THE Hudson REVIEW

Last Letters from Stalingrad

HERBERT GOLD:
I Want a Sunday Kind of Love—a story

JOSEPH KERMAN:
Aaron Copland

NORMAN N. HOLLAND:
The Follies Fellini

SONYA RUDIKOFF:
Great American Painters

Poems by ANTHONY HECHT, GALWAY KINNELL, JAMES WRIGHT, HAYDEN CARRUTH, PETER DAVISON, THEODORE HOLMES, CHARLES TOMLINSON.

Reviews by BENJAMIN DE MOTT, PAUL GOODMAN, PATRICK CRUTTWELL, JOHN SIMON, LOUIS SIMPSON, WILLIAM MEREDITH, SIGURD BURCKHARDT.

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ANTHONY HECHT's "Shades of Keats and Marvell" will appear in an early issue of this Review.

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JAMES WRIGHT's translations of poems by Georg Trakl have been recently published by The Sixties Press.

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A new book by HAYDEN CARRUTH, *Journey to a Known Place,* is being published this month by New Directions.

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CHARLES TOMLINSON has recently published his translations, *Versions from Tyutchev,* with Oxford. Versions from Antonio Machado will appear in a future issue of THE HUDSON REVIEW.

HERBERT GOLD has recently returned to San Francisco, after extensive travels in northern Europe during the summer.

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Last Letters From Stalingrad

Translated by FRANZ SCHNEIDER *and* CHARLES GULLANS

The letters and fragments of letters that follow were originally published in Germany in 1954 by the C. Bertelsmann Verlag (now Sigbert Mohn Verlag), Guetersloh, under the title Letzte Briefe aus Stalingrad. *The following note appeared as a postscript to the German edition:*

"A full account of the fate of these letters would make a fantastic tale of overorganization—of a military and party bureaucracy gone mad with censorship, snooping and analytical and documentary zeal. From the day they were flown out of the Stalingrad trap, the letters passed through serried ranks of bureaus. They were to be used to 'ascertain the morale of the troops'; an order was issued from Hitler's headquarters that they were to be impounded. The order went to the Army High Command and from there to the central censorship bureau of the army postal system. When, in January 1943, the last plane out of Stalingrad landed in Novo-Cherkask, seven bags of mail were seized. The letters were opened; address and sender's name were removed. Then they were classified by content and general tenor, tied into neat bundles and sent to the Army High Command.

The Bureau of Army Information took care of the statistical breakdown of 'troop morale,' dividing it into five rubrics. This was the resulting 'picture':

A—Positive Attitude towards the Leadership	*2.1%*
B—Doubtful " " " "	*4.4%*
C—Negative " " " "	*57.4%*
D—Actively Opposed	*3.4%*
E—Indifferent	*33.0%*

After having been processed and 'taken cognizance of,' the letters, along with other Stalingrad documents such as orders from Hitler, field orders, reports and radio messages—all in all about 1100 lbs. of paper—were placed in the custody of the Army Press Corps,

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whose assignment it was to write a documented account of the Battle of Stalingrad. The German Supreme Command hoped to find itself exculpated, but the language of the documents was unmistakably clear. So the book was suppressed; Goebbels decided that it was 'unacceptable to the German nation.' [The German word here is 'untragbar,' which literally means 'unbearable.' In the stark simplicities of Nazi jargon and thinking it therefore meant 'exterminable.' The Jews also were 'untragbar.']

Ultimately, authenticated copies of the letters found their way into the army archives in Potsdam. From there they were removed a few days before the fall of Berlin and preserved for posterity."

1

. . . MY LIFE HAS CHANGED IN NOTHING; it is now as it was ten years ago, blessed by the stars, avoided by men. I had no friends, and you know why they wanted to have nothing to do with me. I was happy when I could sit at the telescope and look at the sky and the world of stars, happy as a child that is allowed to play with the stars.

You were my best friend, Monica. Yes, you read correctly, you were. The time is too serious for jokes. This letter will take two weeks to reach you. By then you will already have read in the papers what has taken place here. Don't think too much about it, for in reality everything will have ended differently: let other people worry about setting the record straight. What are they to you or me? I always thought in light-years, but I felt in seconds. Here, too, I have much to do with the weather. There are four of us and, if things were to continue the way they are now, we would be content. What we do is very simple. Our job is to measure temperatures and humidity, to report on cloud ceilings and visibility. If some bureaucrat read what I write here, he would have a fit . . . violation of military security. Monica, what is our life compared to the many million years of the starry sky! On this beautiful night, Andromeda and Pegasus are right above my head. I have looked at them for a long time; I shall be very close to them soon. My peace and contentment I owe to the stars, of which you are the most beautiful to me. The stars are eternal, but the life of man is like a speck of dust in the Universe.

Around me everything is collapsing, a whole army is dying, day

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and night are on fire, and four men busy themselves with daily reports on temperature and cloud ceilings. I don't know much about war. No human being has died by my hand. I haven't even fired live ammunition from my pistol. But I know this much: the other side would never show such a lack of understanding for its men. I should have liked to count stars for another few decades, but nothing will ever come of it now, I suppose.

2

. . . I took out your picture once again and looked at it for a long time. I remember the experience we shared that lovely summer evening in the last year of peace, when we walked home through the blooming valley towards our house. When we found each other for the first time, only the voice of the heart spoke in us; later it was the voice of love and happiness. We talked about ourselves and about the future which lay before us like a many-colored carpet.

That gay carpet is no longer there. The summer evening is no longer there, and neither is the blooming valley. And we are no longer together. Instead of the carpet there is now an endless white field, there is no more summer, but only winter, and there is no future, at least not for me, and consequently not for you either. All this time I had a feeling which I could not explain, but today I know that it was anxiety about you. I felt, despite the distance of many thousand kilometers, that it was the same with you. When you receive this letter, listen intently to it, perhaps you will hear my voice then. They tell us that our struggle is for Germany. But there are only a few here who believe that this meaningless sacrifice could be of use to our country.

3

. . . You must get that out of your head, Margaret, and you must do it soon. I would even advise you to be ruthless about it, for your disappointment will be less. In every one of your letters I sense your desire to have me home with you soon. It isn't strange at all that you are looking forward to it. I too am waiting and longing for you passionately. That is not so much what disturbs

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me, but rather the unspoken desire I read between your lines to have not only the husband and lover with you again, but also the pianist. I feel that very distinctly. Is it not a strange confusion of feeling that I, who should be most unhappy, have resigned myself to my fate, and the woman who should have every reason to be thankful that I am still alive (at least so far) is quarreling with the fate that has struck me?

At times I have the suspicion that I am being silently reproached, as if it were my fault that I can play no longer. That's what you wanted to hear. And that's why you kept probing in your letters for the truth which I would have much preferred to tell you in person. Perhaps it is the will of destiny that our situation here has come to a point which permits no excuses and no way out. I do not know whether I shall have a chance to talk to you once more. So it is well that this letter should reach you, and that you know, in case I should turn up some day, that my hands are ruined and have been since the beginning of December. I lost the little finger on my left hand, but worse still is the loss of the three middle fingers of my right hand through frostbite. I can hold my drinking cup only with my thumb and little finger. I am quite helpless; only when one has lost his fingers does one notice how much they are needed for the simplest tasks. The thing I can still do best with my little finger is shoot. Yes, my hands are wrecked. I can't very well spend the rest of my life shooting, simply because I'm no good for anything else. Perhaps I could make out as a game warden? But this is gallows humor; I only write it to calm myself.

Kurt Hahnke, I think you remember him from the Conservatory in '37, played the Appassionata a week ago on a grand piano in a little side street close to Red Square. Such things don't happen every day. The grand piano was standing right in the middle of the street. The house had been blown up, but feeling sorry for the instrument, they must have got it out beforehand and put it in the street. Every passing soldier hammered away at it. I ask you, where else can you find a place with pianos in the streets? As I said, Kurt played incredibly well on January 4. He will be in the very front line soon.

Excuse me; here I am using the word "front line" instead of "first rank,"[1] such is the influence of war on us. If the boy gets

[1] The confusion is between *"vordersten Front"* and *"vordersten Reihe,"* the first of which refers to the line of combat and the second to artistic eminence.

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home, we will soon hear about him. I certainly shall never forget these hours—the kind of audience and the situation were unique. Pity that I am not a writer, so that I could describe how a hundred soldiers squatted around in their great-coats with blankets over their heads. Everywhere there was the sound of explosions, but no one let himself be disturbed. They were listening to Beethoven in Stalingrad, even if they didn't understand him. Do you feel better now that you know the full truth?

4

. . . Just don't bother me with your well meant advice. Don't you know what kind of situation you'll get me into? The way you go on! You wouldn't have done it; you would have known how to do it! Things should have been done in such and such a way, etc., etc.! What is all that supposed to mean? You know that I am of your opinion and that we talked more about it than was safe. But you don't put that sort of thing in writing! Do you think the others are idiots?

If *I* write now, it is because I know that nothing can happen to me, and I took the precaution to leave off my name and return address; moreover, you will receive this letter in the agreed-on way. Even if anybody knew who wrote this letter, I couldn't be safer any place than in Stalingrad. It is so easy to say: Put down your weapons. Do you think the Russians will spare us? You are an intelligent man, so why don't you also demand that your friends refuse to produce ammunition and war materiel?

It is easy to give good advice; but it just won't work the way you think it will. Liberation of nations, nonsense. Nations remain the same. Their rulers change, and bystanders will keep arguing for liberating the people from their respective rulers. The time to act was in 1932; you know that very well. Also, that we let the moment go by. Ten years ago, the ballot would still have done the trick. Today, all it will cost you is your life.

5

. . . This morning in the division command post, Hannes per-

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suaded me to write to you after all. For a whole week I have avoided writing this letter; I kept thinking that uncertainty, painful though it is, still keeps a glimmer of hope alive. I was the same way in thinking about my own fate; every night I went to sleep not knowing how the scales might tip—whether we would get help here or would be destroyed. I didn't even try to come to any final conclusion, to resolve the doubt. Perhaps from cowardice. I might have been killed three times by now, but it would always have been suddenly, without my being prepared. Now things are different; since this morning I know how things stand; and since I feel freer this way, I want you also to be free from apprehension and uncertainty.

I was shocked when I saw the map. We are entirely alone, without help from outside. Hitler has left us in the lurch. If the airfield is still in our possession, this letter may still get out. Our position is to the north of the city. The men of my battery have some inkling of it, too, but they don't know it as clearly as I do. So this is what the end looks like. Hannes and I will not surrender; yesterday, after our infantry had retaken a position, I saw four men who had been taken prisoner by the Russians. No, we shall not go into captivity. When Stalingrad has fallen, you'll hear and read it. And then you'll know that I shall not come back.

6

. . . It is perfectly useless to rebel against it; I would most certainly find a way out if there were one. Of course, I have tried everything to escape from this trap, but there are only two ways left: to heaven or to Siberia. Waiting is the best thing, because, as I said, the other is useless. At home some people will congratulate themselves on being able to keep their chairs, both easy and academic, and in many newspapers you will find beautiful, high-sounding words in big black borders. They will always pay us due honor. Don't be taken in by this idiotic to-do. I am so furious that I could smash everything in sight, but never in my life have I been so helpless.

I continually tell myself one thing: stay healthy, and you will survive the most difficult times. Health is the prerequisite for my return home. I will not resign my chair at home. When you meet

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my colleagues, tell them so, exactly as I write it. The higher the chair, the harder you fall.

7

. . . You are the wife of a German officer; so you will take what I have to tell you, upright and unflinching, as upright as you stood on the station platform the day I left for the East. I am no letter-writer and my letters have never been longer than a page. Today there would be a great deal to say, but I will save it for later, i.e., six weeks if all goes well and a hundred years if it doesn't. You will have to reckon with the latter possibility. If all goes well, we shall be able to talk about it for a long time, so why should I attempt to write much now, since it comes hard to me. If things turn out badly, words won't do much good anyhow.

You know how I feel about you, Augusta. We have never talked much about our feelings. I love you very much and you love me, so you shall know the truth. It is in this letter. The truth is the knowledge that this is the grimmest of struggles in a hopeless situation. Misery, hunger, cold, renunciation, doubt, despair and horrible death. I will say no more about it. I did not talk about it during my leave either, and there's nothing about it in my letters. When we were together (and I mean through our letters as well), we were man and wife, and the war, however necessary, was an ugly accompaniment to our lives. But the truth is also the knowledge that what I wrote above is no complaint or lament but a statement of objective fact.

I cannot deny my share of personal guilt in all this. But it is in a ratio of 1 to 70 millions. The ratio is small; still, it is there. I wouldn't think of evading my responsibility; I tell myself that, by giving my life, I have paid my debt. One cannot argue about questions of honor.

Augusta, in the hour in which you must be strong, you will feel this also. Don't be bitter and do not suffer too much from my absence. I am not cowardly, only sad that I cannot give greater proof of my courage than to die for this useless, not to say criminal, cause. You know the family motto of the von H—'s: "Guilt recognized is guilt expiated."

Don't forget me too quickly.

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8

. . . Again I am writing a short letter, although I wrote one to you and a second one to Hans Müllner only yesterday. You certainly can't complain about lack of mail. A buddy will take this one along. I wish Grandmother a happy 74th birthday, and I am sorry that I cannot eat a piece of her cake. Can you get the things you need to bake a cake? No cake for us, but once we are out of here, we'll have everything again; until then we simply have to tighten our belts. Go to the savings bank, take out fifty marks, and buy Grandmother a present. She is to enjoy herself. The Bergers probably have some coffee left, her husband being with the port administration. If they have some, they will certainly give it to you. You just tell them it's for the birthday party. In my time I have done the Bergers many favors.

I am writing nothing but nonsense. But nonsense is better than no mail at all. And you never know if the next bullet won't have your name on it. But don't be afraid for us. I am sure we'll get out of here, and then we'll all go home on leave for four weeks. It's very cold here now; do you have snow, too? We don't have to strew any sand here; everyone has to look out so he doesn't fall.

9

. . . Around me everything is confused, so that I don't know how to begin. Wouldn't it be better to start at the end?

Dearest Anne, you will probably be surprised to receive such a relatively funny letter. But if you take a closer look, you'll find that the letter is not funny at all. You always used to take me for a philistine, and I have to concede you a point—for example, in the way I stowed my lunch into my briefcase. One sandwich on the right, one on the left, and on top of them I put the apples, and on top of that the thermos bottle. The bottle had to lie across the apples, so that it would not melt the butter. It was a—how did Uncle Herbert always call it?—a tranquil time. Today I am not a philistine any more. You should see how I go to my "place of employment." It is cozy and warm in our bunker. We have dismantled a few trucks and rerouted the pieces to our stove. It's strictly against regulations, but that is the least of our worries.

My "place of employment" is right next door, as I already wrote

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you a few days ago. It too is a bunker, in which a captain lived a short while ago. Here I am telling you in great detail how things look around here, and all the time I want to write about something entirely different. Then again, I don't want to, but it is advisable and even of some importance that I do write about it. I don't want to cause you unnecessary anxiety, but things are supposed to be pretty murky here. You hear it from all sides. We are stationed a long way behind the lines; once in a while we hear a shot. If it weren't for that, we wouldn't be reminded of the war at all. As things are right now, I could stand it for another hundred years. But not without you. And it won't last that long anyway; we expect to get out of here any day. But this hope doesn't fit in with the rumors.

The army has been surrounded now for seven weeks, and it can't last another seven. My leave was already due in September, but it didn't come through. I consoled myself with the others, who also had to kiss their leaves good-bye. Yesterday morning the word was that one-third of us are going home on leave towards the end of January. The master sergeant from the staff company claims to have heard it. Or it may take a few days longer than that. Nobody really knows what is up around here. I haven't been with you for eight months now; a few days won't make any difference. Unfortunately I won't be able to bring you much, but I'll see what I can do in Lemberg. I am looking forward to a real day on leave, and even more to seeing you and Mother again. When you receive the telegram, send news to Uncle Herbert immediately. It is good to be looking forward to something; I live on this anticipation, especially since yesterday morning. Every day I mark off a day on my calendar, and every mark means that I am a day closer to you.

10

. . . You are my witness that I never wanted to go along with it, because I was afraid of the East, in fact of war in general. I have never been a soldier, only a man in uniform. What do I get out of it? What do the others get out of it, those who went along and were not afraid? Yes, what are we getting out of it? We, who are playing the walk-on parts in this madness incarnate? What good does a hero's death do us? I have played death on the stage dozens

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of times, but I was only playing, and you sat out front in plush seats, and thought my acting authentic and true. It is terrible to realize how little the acting had to do with real death.

You were supposed to die heroically, inspiringly, movingly, from inner conviction and for a great cause. But what is death in reality here? Here they croak, starve to death, freeze to death—it's nothing but a biological fact like eating and drinking. They drop like flies; nobody cares and nobody buries them. Without arms or legs and without eyes, with bellies torn open, they lie around everywhere. One should make a movie of it; it would make "the most beautiful death in the world" impossible once and for all. It is a death fit for beasts; later they will ennoble it on granite friezes showing "dying warriors" with their heads or arms in bandages.

Poems, novels, and hymns will be written and sung. And in the churches they will say masses. I'll have no part of it, because I have no desire to rot in a mass grave. I have written the same thing to Professor H—. You and he will hear from me again. Don't be surprised if it takes a while, because I have decided to take my fate into my own hands.

11

. . . Today O— and I are enjoying a wonderfully quiet evening. For once everybody is sitting around across the street and not here. The Russians are quiet, and we were able to close up shop early. A good bottle of Cordon Rouge drunk peacefully in the evening made us feel especially good.

I read Binding's war diary and some other things. How incredibly well this man echoes what moves and touches us out here. He purges the experience of all that is false and irrelevant. Only the crucial things radiate from his mind, from his words.

We expect nothing any more of great decisions that would have to be made . . . by the men on top. Whether time will not outrun these decisions anyhow, no one can say! But there is nothing else for us to hope for. The only thing that *has* been done until now has been fearfully violent fighting over Hill X inside and outside the city. Generals and colonels have played with the possibility

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that this hill, of all things, might be a turning point in world history! And not only generals!

Every day a few positions are taken; every day, the enemy or we, depending on who happens to be holding them at the time, are thrown out again! Neither the enemy nor we have so far had sense enough to decide to take only what can be held.

One can safely say that with little things it is the same as with big things! This perpetual activity without result demands an indolence or an endurance which is almost impossible to muster, and since it consists only in waiting, it wears you out.

Soon it will be ten o'clock. I want to sleep as much as I still can. The more you sleep, the less you feel the hunger. And hunger is not pleasant, it's cruel.

All my love to you.

12

. . . Well, now you know that I shall never return. Break it to our parents gently. I am deeply shaken and doubt everything. I used to be strong and full of faith; now I am small and without faith. I will never know many of the things that happen here; but the little that I have taken part in is already so much that it chokes me. No one can tell me any longer that the men died with the words "Deutschland" or "Heil Hitler" on their lips. There is plenty of dying, no question of that; but the last word is "mother" or the name of someone dear, or just a cry for help. I have seen hundreds fall and die already, and many belonged to the Hitler Youth as I did; but all of them, if they still could speak, called for help or shouted a name which could not help them anyway.

The Führer made a firm promise to bail us out of here; they read it to us and we believed in it firmly. Even now I still believe it, because I have to believe in something. If it is not true, what else could I believe in? I would no longer need spring, summer, or anything that gives pleasure. So leave me my faith, dear Greta; all my life, at least eight years of it, I believed in the Führer and his word. It is terrible how they doubt here, and shameful to listen to what they say without being able to reply, because they have the facts on their side.

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If what we were promised is not true, then Germany will be lost, for in that case no more promises can be kept. Oh, these doubts, these terrible doubts, if they could only be cleared up soon!

13

. . . Unfortunately, the Christmas I have to tell about was not beautiful, but we were comfortably warm. Our position is right on the banks of the Volga. We got hold of some rum; it was thin but tasted marvelous. My buddy brought something with him from division headquarters: ham and meat-jelly. I suppose he swiped it from the kitchen, but it tasted magnificent, and they have more, else he couldn't have swiped it. Bread is mighty scarce. So we made pancakes: flour, water, salt, and underneath it ham in the pan. The flour wasn't exactly home-grown either.[2] This is the fourth Christmas since the war started, but this time was the saddest of all. We will have to make up for it all when the war is over, and I hope that next year we can celebrate Christmas at home.

We have been in Stalingrad for three months now and still have not made any headway. It is rather peaceful here, but on the other side, on the steppes, they are fighting. The fellows there don't have it as good as we do. But that's their bad luck. Perhaps it will be our turn soon, because their losses are heavy. But the best thing is not to think about it. And yet you keep thinking about it; if you haven't anything to do for 24 hours but daydream, your thoughts turn towards home. Did all of you think of me on Christmas Eve? I had such a strange feeling, and it sometimes does happen that you feel it when someone thinks of you.

14

. . . The time has come for me to send you greetings once more, and to ask you to greet once more all the loved ones at home.

The Russians have broken through everywhere. Our troops, weakened by long periods of hunger without possibility of *(illegible),* engaged in the heaviest fighting since the beginning of this

[2] In other words, they stole it.

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battle, without a day's relief, and in a state of complete physical exhaustion, have performed heroically. None of them surrenders! When bread, ammunition, gasoline and manpower give out, it is, God knows, no victory for the enemy to crush us!

We are aware that we are the victims of serious mistakes in leadership; also, the wearing down of the fortress Stalingrad will cause most severe damage to Germany and her people. But in spite of it, we still believe in a happy resurrection of our nation. Truehearted men will see to that! You will have to do a thorough job in putting all madmen, fools, and criminals out of business. And those who will return home will sweep them away like chaff before the wind. We are Prussian officers and know what we have to do when the time comes.

In thinking over my life once more, I can look back on it with thankfulness. It has been beautiful, very beautiful. It was like climbing a ladder, and even this last rung is beautiful, a crowning of it, I might almost say a harmonious completion.

You must tell my parents that they should not be sad; they must remember me with happy hearts. No halo, please; I have never been an angel! Nor do I want to confront my God as one; I'll manage it as a soldier, with the free, proud soul of a cavalryman, as a *Herr!* I am not afraid of death; my faith gives me this beautiful independence of spirit. For this I am especially thankful.

Hand my legacy on to those who come after us: raise them to be *Herren!*[3] Severe simplicity of thought and action! No squandering of energies!

Be especially loving with my parents and so help them get over the first grief. Put up a wooden cross for me in the park cemetery, as simple and beautiful as Uncle X's.

Maintain Sch— as the family seat of the X's. That is my great wish. In my writing desk is a letter in which I recorded my wishes during my last leave.

So, once more, I turn to all of you, dear ones. My thanks once more, for everything, and hold your heads high! Keep on!

I embrace all of you!

[3] This term, which might be translated as "gentlemen," is used here in a special and emphatic sense. It means "noblemen" and beyond that, men who are their own masters.

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15

. . . If there is a God, you wrote me in your last letter, then He will bring you back to me soon and healthy; you went on: a human being like you, who loves animals and flowers and does no harm to anyone, who loves and adores his wife and child, will always have God's protection.

I thank you for these words, and I always carry this letter with me in my *brustbeutel.*[4] But, dearest, if your words are weighed now and you make the existence of God dependent upon them, you will have to make a difficult and great decision. I am a religious man, you always were a believer, but this will have to change now if we accept the consequences of the conviction which we held up to now, because something has happened which has overthrown everything in which we believed. I am searching for words to tell you. Or have you guessed already? I find a rather strange tone in your last letter of December 8. Now it is the middle of January.

This will be my last letter for a long time, perhaps for ever. It will be taken along by a friend who has to go to the airfield, because it is said that tomorrow the last plane will fly out of the pocket. The situation has become untenable. The Russians are within three kilometers of our last airfield, and once this is lost, not a mouse will get out, not to mention me. Of course, hundreds of thousands of others won't get out either. But it is small comfort to have shared your own destruction with others.

If there is a God. Over there on the other side many ask the same question, perhaps millions in England and France. I don't believe any longer that God can be good, for then he would not permit such great injustice. I don't believe in it any more, for he would have enlightened the minds of those people who began this war and always talked of peace and the Almighty in three languages. I don't believe in God any more, because he betrayed us. I don't believe any more, and you must see how you can come to terms with your faith.

16

. . . On the evening before the holy day, in a hut which was still

[4] A small leather pouch fastened to a thong around the neck.

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fairly intact, eleven soldiers celebrated in quiet worship. It was not easy to find them in the herd of the doubting, hopeless, and disappointed. But those I found came happily and with a glad and open heart. It was a strange congregation which assembled to celebrate the birthday of the Christchild. There are many altars in the wide world, but surely none poorer than ours here. Yesterday the box still held anti-aircraft shells; today my hand spread over it the field-grey tunic of a comrade whose eyes I closed last Friday in this very room. I wrote his wife a letter of consolation. May God protect her.

I read my boys the Christmas story according to the gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verses 1-17; gave them hard black bread as the holy sacrifice and sacrament of the altar, the true body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and entreated the Lord to have pity on them and to give them grace. I did not say anything about the fifth commandment. The men sat on footstools and looked up to me from large eyes in their starved faces. They were all young, except one, who was 51. I am very happy that I was permitted to console their hearts and give them courage. When it was over, we shook each other's hands, took down addresses, and promised to look up relatives and tell them about our Christmas Eve celebration in 1942, in case one of us should return home alive.

May God hold his hands over you, dear parents, for now the evening is at hand, and we will do well to set our house in order. We will go into the evening and the night calmly, if it is the will of the Lord of the world. But we do not look into a night without end. We give our life back into the hands of God; may He be merciful when the hour has come.

17

. . . In Stalingrad, to put the question of God's existence means to deny it. I must tell you this, Father, and I feel doubly sorry for it. You have raised me, because I had no mother, and always kept God before my eyes and soul.

And I regret my words doubly, because they will be my last, and I won't be able to speak any other words afterwards which might reconcile you and make up for these.

You are a pastor, Father, and in one's last letter one says only

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what is true or what one believes might be true. I have searched for God in every crater, in every destroyed house, on every corner, in every friend, in my fox hole, and in the sky. God did not show Himself, even though my heart cried for Him. The houses were destroyed, the men as brave or as cowardly as myself, on earth there was hunger and murder, from the sky came bombs and fire, only God was not there. No, Father, there is no God. Again I write it and know that this is terrible and that I cannot make up for it ever. And if there should be a God, He is only with you in the hymnals and the prayers, in the pious sayings of the priests and pastors, in the ringing of the bells and the fragrance of incense, but not in Stalingrad.

18

. . . It's enough to drive me mad, dear Helmut; here I have a chance to write and I don't know to whom. A thousand poor devils who are lying in their holes up front and have no suspicion of such a chance would envy me and give me a year's pay for it. A year ago we still were sitting in Jüterbog together, cramming "military science." And now I sit right in the middle of the shit and don't know what to do with all that trash. But it is just the same with everybody else around here. It is an idiotic situation. If you should ever notice the name "Zaritza" in the OKW-report[5] (just possibly they might happen to tell the truth some day), then you'll know where I am. Do we live on the moon, or do you? We sit in the mud with 200,000 men, with nothing but Russians all around us, and are not permitted to say that we are encircled, completely and without hope.

I received your letter on Monday, today is Sunday, a real holiday. Above all, I would like to comment on the words with which you congratulated me for having been given front-line duty. I have just read "Gneisenau" (not everybody has time to do that) and would like to quote you a sentence which he wrote to Beguelin after the defense of Kolberg: ". . . On reading this news, I thought that they might have heard the thunder of our cannon and might send up prayers for our salvation. There were days when the earth shook, and I behaved like a gambler who bravely puts up

[5] *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht,* Supreme Command of the Armed Forces.

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his last louis d'or in the hope that his luck will turn. For there was a time once when I had ammunition for only fourteen days, and yet I could not decrease my fire for fear the enemy would become aware of my lack of ammunition. It is a scandal how badly this fortress was provided."

Ah, dear boy, those were the days. Gneisenau should have heard the rocket salvos, and the discharge of 200 guns per kilometer. Not only he, but you too, and then you wouldn't be in such a hurry to come "up front." Don't be peeved now. I don't want to shatter your faith in your own bravery, but here it would do no good. Here the brave and the cowards die in one hole without a chance of defending themselves. If just once we had had ammunition for "only" 14 days, man! would we have had fun with the fireworks! My battery has just 26 rounds left, that's all, and there will be no more. Since you are one of the disciples of St. Barbara,[6] you can draw your own conclusions. Here I am: still in one piece, with a fairly normal pulse, a dozen cigarettes, had soup day before yesterday, liberated a canned ham today from a supply bomb (there is no more regular distribution; everyone is on his own), am squatting in a cellar, burning up furniture, 26 years old and otherwise no fool, one of those who was mighty keen on getting his bars and yelled "Heil Hitler" with the rest of you; and now it's either die like a dog or off to Siberia. That wouldn't be so bad. But to know that it is done for something utterly senseless makes me see red.

But let them come. The third still has 26 rounds and their commander an 08 with six shiny bullets. It is time to finish; "vespers" are coming, time to crawl a little deeper into the earth. Dear old boy, you can save yourself an answer to this letter, but think of my lines in, let's say, two weeks. You don't have to be clairvoyant to foresee the end. What it will actually be like, you'll never know.

19

. . . I just heard at the Command Post that mail is going out. I hope you can read what I am writing. There is no better paper available here. But the main thing is what is on it. And it's getting dark too. I have been detailed as a motorcycle courier and get around a lot. Otherwise I wouldn't have known that we are al-

[6] The patron saint of artillery.

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lowed to send letters. I am still doing pretty well; I hope the same is true of you. Except that riding around in ice and snow is no picnic. Guess who I ran into? The son of Gründel, the merchant. He is in the depot. He will be sitting pretty for a long time yet. In this way I got a can of pork and two loaves of bread. We are not allowed to send packages, otherwise I would send you the can. But then, I won't mind eating it myself either. How is little Marie doing and how are the folks? I haven't got a letter for a long time now. The last one came two weeks ago, from Richard. Now I have to finish, because it is already dark, and I still have ten kilometers to go.

20

. . . I have written to you twenty-six times from this damned city, and you answered me with seventeen letters. Now I shall write just once more and then never again. There, I said it. For a long time I thought about how I should formulate so fateful a sentence so that it would say everything and still not hurt too much.

I am saying good-bye to you, because since this morning the issue is settled. I will not comment on the military situation in my letter; it is clear-cut and completely up to the Russians. The only question is how long we will be around. It may last a few more days or just a few hours. Our whole life together is there for us to see. We have honored and loved each other, and waited for each other now for two years. It is good that so much time has passed. It has increased the anticipation of reunion, to be sure, but also in large measure helped to make us strangers. And time will have to heal the wounds of my not coming back.

In January you will be twenty-eight. That is still very young for such a good-looking woman, and I am glad that I could pay you this compliment again and again. You will miss me very much, but even so, don't withdraw from other people. Let a few months pass, but no more. Gertrud and Claus need a father. Don't forget that you must live for the children, and don't make too much fuss about their father. Children forget quickly, especially at that age. Take a good look at the man of your choice, take note of his eyes and the pressure of his handshake, as was the case with us, and you won't go wrong. But above all, raise the children to be upright

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human beings who can carry their heads high and look everybody straight in the eye. I am writing these lines with a heavy heart. You wouldn't believe me if I said that it was easy, but don't be worried, I am not afraid of what is coming. Keep telling yourself, and the children also when they have grown older, that their father never was a coward, and that they must never be cowards either.

21

. . . This terrible confusion has been going on for eleven days now. Today I can send you a few lines just once more. I hope that you received all the rest in good condition. I have been spared nothing either. But still, all in all life was beautiful once, so these days have to be endured calmly.

We have been pushed entirely into the city. This damned city! If only the end would come soon! Then, as I wrote before: "Let me go on my way contentedly. . . ."[7]

Farewell!

22

. . . Dearest, I think of you all the time. Today, standing in the chow line I thought of you again. Of the wonderful food you used to cook. My socks are in shreds, too, and I can't get rid of my cough any more. No pills are available for it. You could send me cough syrup, but don't use any glass bottles. Have you caught cold too? Always put on something good and warm. Do you have enough coal? Just go and see Al—, he got lumber from me for his furniture. Let him give you coal for it now. I hope Uncle Paul has nailed the weather stripping to your windows; otherwise it will be too late for it this year. I did not celebrate Christmas here. I was on the road with the car, and we got stuck in the snow because we went the wrong way. But we soon got out again. I have decided that next year we will celebrate a real Christmas, and I am going to give you a beautiful present.

It is not my fault that I can't give it to you now. The Russians are all around us, and we won't get out again until Hitler gets us out. But you must not tell that to anyone. It is supposed to be a surprise.

[7] A line from a hymn, so the meaning is resignation to the will of God.

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23

. . . We have had to swallow a lot; will swallow this too! Stupid situation. You might say, devilishly difficult. Beats me how we are to get out of here. Not really my business, though. We marched in here on orders, shoot on orders, starve on orders, die on orders, and will march out again, all on orders. Could have marched out a long time ago, except the grand strategists haven't come to an agreement yet. Soon it will be too late, if it isn't already. One thing is sure, we'll march once again on orders. In all probability in the direction originally planned, but without weapons and under a different command.

Kemner of the heavies right next to us has been shooting craps with Helms . . . Pay gone, watch, ring and an IOU, even his piano in home sweet home. Around here people get the most idiotic ideas. Am curious about the legal title to that gambled-away piano. Little Fatso won back his watch and ring. Perhaps he will win the summer-house tomorrow. But if both kick off, how will the estates be probated? Would have liked to know all that, but there won't be any time. Am ignorant of many things, will probably get over that too. As I said at the beginning, we've had to swallow a lot. Tell it to Egon. Title: "Troubles of a Second Lieutenant in Stalingrad." When the chips are down—seems to me that will be soon—we'll be in there shooting. Shoot guns even better than craps.

24

. . . Now that I know where I stand, I release you from your vow. This has not been easy for me to do, but the differences between us were too great. I looked for a wife with a generous heart, but it wasn't supposed to be that generous. I have written to Mother already and told her what she has to know. Please spare me the trouble of naming the witnesses and mentioning the circumstances which gave me proof of your infidelity. I feel no hatred for you; rather I advise you to choose good grounds for divorce and speed up the procedure. I have written to Dr. F— that I agree to a divorce. And if I am back home six months from now, I do not wish to be reminded of you by anything.

I shall pass up my leave in February or March.

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25

. . . Just now the master sergeant told me that I cannot go home for Christmas. I told him that he has to keep his promise, and he sent me to the captain. The captain told me that others had wanted to go on leave for Christmas too, and that they too had promised it to their relatives without being able to keep the promise. And so it wasn't his fault that we couldn't go. We should be glad that we were still alive, the captain said, and the long trip wouldn't be good in the cold winter anyhow.

Dear Maria, you must not be angry now because I cannot come on leave. I often think of our house and our little Luise. I wonder if she can laugh already. Do you have a beautiful Christmas tree? We are supposed to get one also, if we don't move into other quarters. But I don't want to write too much about things here, otherwise you'll cry. I'll enclose a picture; I have a beard in it; it is already three months old and was taken in Kharkov by a friend. A lot of rumors are going around here, but I can't figure them out. Sometimes I am afraid we will not see each other again. Heiner from Krefeld told me that a man must not write this; it only frightens his relatives. But what if it's true!

Maria, dear Maria, I have only been beating around the bush. The master sergeant said that this would be the last mail because no more planes are leaving. I can't bring myself to lie. And now, nothing will probably ever come of my leave. If I could only see you just once more; how awful that is! When you light the candles, think of your father in Stalingrad.

26

. . . I still must tell you that we went to the movies on Thursday. It was not a regular show, otherwise you might think that we have more time than we know what to do with. We saw "Geier-Walli," all sat on the floor on their helmets or squatting like Negroes. It is a very nice film. You wrote me that I should be careful with girls. But, Maria, there aren't any girls around here. We were all by ourselves, close to two hundred men. The movie came from the propaganda company. They play in the barn every evening; only yesterday, so I have heard, the Russians fired into the village. I had planned to see "Geier-Walli" earlier in Dresden and Hanover; but

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I couldn't make it then. In Stalingrad I finally succeeded and saw "Geier-Walli." What a joke. If I go on leave, I am going to see "Geier-Walli" in a real movie house. I hope they will play the film in Dresden. Even in the barn the film was quite beautiful. Only the sound couldn't be heard properly, and then the others made so many jokes, and smoked so much, you couldn't see anything for smoke. Some also used the show to get warm and to get some sleep. "Geier-Walli" in Stalingrad. I'll never forget it.

27

. . . What a misfortune that there had to be a war! The beautiful villages fell victim to it and were destroyed. And the fields are not tilled anywhere. And the worst is that so many people have died. Now they lie buried in enemy country. What a great misfortune this is! But you should be glad that the war is in a country far away and not in our beloved German homeland. It must not ever come there and increase the misery! You must be real thankful for that and thank the Lord on your knees. We are standing here on the banks of the Volga and keep watch. For you and our home. If we did not stand here, the Russians would break through and demolish everything. They are very violent and many millions strong. They are not bothered by the cold. But we are terribly cold.

I am lying in a hole dug in the snow, and it's only in the evening that I can slip into a cellar for a few hours. You wouldn't believe how good that is. We are on guard, so you don't need to be afraid. But we are getting fewer and fewer all the time, and if things continue this way, soon there won't be anyone here. But Germany has many more soldiers, and they will all fight for their country. We all wish that there will be peace soon and that we shall be victorious. That is the main thing. Keep your fingers crossed!

28

. . . Even for me this letter is difficult, how much more difficult will it be for you! Unfortunately, there won't be any good news in this letter. And it hasn't been improved by my waiting ten days either. The situation has now become so bad we fear we'll soon be com-

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pletely cut off from the outside. Just now we were assured that this mail will definitely get out. If I knew that there would be another opportunity, I would wait still longer. But that is just what I don't know; so, for better or for worse, I have to come out with it. For me the war is over.

I am in the field hospital in Gumrak, waiting to be transported home by plane. Although I am waiting with great longing, the date is always changed. *That* I will be coming home is a great joy for me and for you, my dear. But the condition in which I'll get home won't be any joy to you. I am in complete despair when I think of lying before you as a cripple. But you must know sometime that my legs were shot off.

I'll be quite honest in writing about it. The right leg is totally shattered and amputated below the knee. The left one is amputated in the thigh. The doctor thinks that with prosthesis I should be able to get around like a healthy man. The doctor is a good man and means well. I hope he is right. Now you know before you see me. Dear Elise, if I only knew what you are thinking. I have time all day long to think of nothing but that. Often my thoughts are with you. Sometimes I have also wished that I were dead, but that is a serious sin and one must not say such a thing.

Over eighty men are lying in this tent; but outside there are countless men. Through the tent you can hear their screaming and moaning, and no one can help them. Next to me lies a sergeant from Bromberg, shot through the groin. The doctor told him he would be returned home soon. But to the medic he said, "He won't last until evening. Let him lie there until then." The doctor is such a good man. On the other side, right next to me against the wall, lies a soldier from Breslau who has lost an arm and his nose, and he told me that he wouldn't need any more handkerchiefs. When I asked him what he would do if he had to cry, he answered me, "No one here, you and me included, will have a chance to cry any more. Soon others will be crying over us."

29

. . . Axel is writing this letter for me. His real name isn't Axel at all but Lachmann, and he comes from Königsberg. But we call him Axel. My arm is propped up and wrapped in thick bandages,

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so I cannot write. I'll soon be home, the doctor told me, and I am looking forward to it very much. There is a little piece missing on my arm, the doctor said that too. Only the funny thing is that I cannot move my fingers. As a gardener I need my fingers. The soil here is very rich and soft. We sure could use some of that in Lüneburg.[8] There is snow outside, you can't see the soil. Four days ago I lay in a hole a yard deep, and all day long I observed the soil; good soil for wheat, naturally there was no trace of fertilizer; the steppes produce their own. In this hole I got scared. Today I laugh about it. I don't have a very comfortable bed, but once I am home I'll laugh even more. And all of you will laugh with me.

30

. . . I have received your answer. You will hardly expect thanks for it. This letter will be short. I should have known better when I asked you to help me. You always were and you remain forever "righteous." This wasn't unknown to either Mama or me. But we could hardly expect that you would sacrifice your son to "righteousness." I asked you to get me out of here because this strategic nonsense isn't worth biting the dust for. It would have been easy for you to put in a word for me, and the appropriate order would have reached me. But you don't understand the situation. Very well, Father.

This letter will not only be short, but also the last one I write you. I won't have any more opportunities to write to you, even if I wanted to. It is also unimaginable that I should ever stand face to face with you again and have to tell you what I think. And because neither I in person nor another letter will ever speak to you again, I will once more recall to you your words of December 26: "You became a soldier voluntarily; it was easy to stand under the flag in peacetime, but difficult to hold it high during the war. You will be faithful to this flag and be victorious with it." These words were much clearer than the position you have taken during the last few years. You will have to remember them, because the time is coming when every German with any sense will curse the madness of this war. And you will see how empty are those words about the flag with which I was supposed to be victorious.

[8] The country around Lüneburg has very poor, sandy soil.

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There is no victory, Herr General; there are only flags and men that fall, and in the end there will be neither flags nor men. Stalingrad is not a military necessity but a political gamble. And your[9] son is not participating in this experiment, Herr General! You blocked his way to life; he will choose the second way, which also leads to life, but in an opposite direction and on the other side of the front. Think of your words, and I hope that, when the whole show collapses, you will remember the flag and stand by it.

31

. . . How many letters have I written up to now? Thirty-eight according to my calculation, today's included. In August you wrote me that you keep a mail book, a real file of pen pals with their addresses and peculiarities, the dates you became acquainted with them, and how the friendships fared. It amused me greatly. Did you add the picture which I sent you to your file? My mail book is too inaccurate; your bookkeeping is probably better than the little marks I make in my pocket calendar. After all it doesn't really matter whether I wrote you 36 or 37 letters. I am number five among your pen pals. It must be very interesting to read all the letters you have received. They come from all theatres of the war, don't they? When the war is over, you will have a magnificent volume of memoirs in letter form. This year, at Christmas, we wanted to meet each other for the first time in Karlsruhe. Nothing came of it. The future also looks bleak to me, very bleak. I see almost no hope.

Thank God, I have gotten around to saying it. There won't be any meeting; even the date for the coming year can't be kept. Dear girl, what a fizzle! The stupid thing is that all one can do is look on; that's what's slowly driving me crazy. If only I had toddled off for home in September, when I caught that shrapnel in my arm. But I wanted to be around when we captured Stalingrad, and I have often regretted this crazy idea since.

They were pretty funny letters you received from me; I have always been a joker, as you can testify. But jokes won't help us along now; things are getting serious.

What will you write down in column six of your mail book? In

[9] From this point to the end, he uses the formal mode of address in speaking to the man who was his father but who has now become a mere general.

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any case, don't write "He died for Greater Germany," etc., for that wouldn't be true. Write "for Hanna on such and such a date," for all I care. I hope you won't find this tone frivolous. I mentioned your other pen pals. One of these days, a few of them will go out of commission too. But their circumstances are different. They will just stop writing all of a sudden. Their letters will just stop coming. But I give you formal notice. Fräulein Hanna, this is more or less my last letter, as it were. Farewell. The hope of seeing each other some day is being sacrificed to this idiotic and totally one-sided struggle. Farewell, and as a good-bye my thanks for the time which you have lovingly devoted to me. At first I meant to write "wasted," but I thought better of it. It was not a waste of time, I got a great deal of pleasure from your letters.

32

. . . Today I talked to Hermann. He is south of the front, a few hundred yards from me. Not much is left of his regiment. But the son of baker B— is still with him. Hermann still had the letter in which you told us of Father's and Mother's death. I talked to him once more, for I am the elder brother, and I tried to console him, though I too am at the end of my rope. It is good that Father and Mother will not know that Hermann and I will never come home again. It is terribly hard that you will have to carry the burden of four dead people through your future life.

I wanted to be a theologian, Father wanted to have a house, and Hermann wanted to build fountains. Nothing worked out that way. You know yourself what the outlook is at home, and we know only too well what it is here. No, those things we planned certainly did not turn out the way we imagined. Our parents are buried under the ruins of their house, and we, though it may sound harsh, are buried with a few hundred or so men in a ravine in the southern part of the pocket. Soon these ravines will be full of snow.

33

. . . When I come to think about it, it was only here that I began to reflect on my environment, but without any positive results.

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One should reflect often, but it takes time. Basically, this would not be too bad, for I never had so much time as in this war, and especially here in Stalingrad. A few days ago I talked to the chaplain, and we had a long conversation together. But we did not really agree with each other, for it seemed to me that suffering is greater than the possibility of assuaging it. The chaplain thought that there we had reached a point where philosophy has to end and religion begin. One of us is surely right. But I ask myself: what difference does it make? I am continually thinking; I brood and sit in my bunker for hours.

Most esteemed Herr Geheimrat! We have no need to discuss private matters, and I am very glad not to be involved in family ties like my comrades. Those surely must be terrible and torturing thoughts, which could drive a man to despair. Those perpetual anxieties about wife and child and what not. Every day I hear what they are talking about; sometimes it is tragic, sometimes ridiculous to see how seriously they take everything, most of all themselves. Some talk about their business and wonder if their houses are damaged, others are full of worries about their packages on the way to and from home. And I pondered what those packages leaving Stalingrad could possibly contain. A fellow from Lüdenscheid who is stationed with me asks in every letter about his cat! Grotesque! Money, job, position, property. But above all the fear about their personal fate. And they write about this fear in many of their letters. I feel disgusted when I see how they behave.

Just an hour ago, a captain who shares the bunker with me asked if I had heard of the Russian breakthrough in the north. As if that could change the situation. Everywhere they are pulling together towards the center of the pocket, but the haste with which they do so raises the suspicion that they are looking for a way out. But there is no way out that they would find acceptable. Their thinking and their common sense, insofar as they have any, is destroyed by fear. And they don't even notice how ridiculous and unmanly their behavior is.

My field of vision extends only about a hundred yards and covers approximately a hundred men. They are all alike; namely, cowardly. Once in a while someone comes slithering down the hill or limping from the front line. And starts shaking his head in

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wonder when he sticks his nose in here. With these people here we cannot win a war, let alone this war. It's lucky that the men on the line behave differently from this pitiful bunch of left-over staffs with their confusion of functions. I ask myself what kind of role I ought to be playing. Am I brave, or whatever one is to call it? Am I brave because I don't run back and forth from shelter to shelter, cackling like a scared chicken? Am I brave because I don't hunt for rumors and spread them, because I sleep well at night and don't make speeches about what I'll be doing on this or that day?

Herr Geheimrat! Stalingrad is a great education for the German people; too bad that those who are getting this object lesson will hardly be able to make use of it later. One should preserve the results. I am a fatalist. My personal needs are so small that the moment the first Russian comes in here I can pick up my bag and start walking. I won't shoot; why should I? Just to kill one or two people I don't know? I shall not even shoot myself, why should I? Would it be doing a service to anyone, perhaps Herr Hitler? I have learned more during my four months of war here than I could have learned in a lifetime, even if I lived to be a hundred. The only thing I regret is that I am compelled by circumstance to spend my last days in such wretched company.

34

. . . Nobody knows what will happen to us now, but I think this is the end. Those are hard words, but you must understand them the way they are meant. Times are different now from the day when I said good-bye and became a soldier. Then we still lived in an atmosphere which was nourished by a thousand hopes and expectations of everything turning out well in the end. But even then we were hiding a paralyzing fear beneath the words of farewell which were to console us for our two months of happiness as man and wife. I still remember one of your letters in which you wrote that you just wanted to bury your face in your hands in order to forget. And I told you then that all this had to be and that the nights in the East were much darker and more difficult than those at home.

The dark nights of the East have remained, and they have

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turned much darker than I had ever anticipated. In such nights one often listens for the deeper meaning of life. And sometimes there is an answer. Now space and time stand between us; and I am about to step over the threshold which will separate us eternally from our own little world and lead into that greater one which is more dangerous, yes, even devastating. If I could have made it through this war safely, I would have understood for the first time what it means to be man and wife in its true and deepest sense. I also know it now—now that these last lines are going to you.

35

. . . During the last few nights I have wept so much that it seems unbearable even to myself. I saw one of my fellow soldiers weep also, but for a different reason. He was weeping for the tanks he lost; they were his whole pride. And though I don't understand my own weakness, I do understand how a man can mourn dead war materiel. I am a soldier and I am prepared to believe that tanks are not inanimate materiel to him. But everything considered, the remarkable fact is that two men weep at all. I was always susceptible to tears. A moving experience or a noble action made me weep. It could happen in the movie theater, when I read a book, or saw an animal suffer. I cut myself off from external circumstances and immersed myself in what I saw and felt. But the loss of material goods never bothered me. Therefore, I would have been incapable of weeping about tanks which, when they ran out of gas, were used in the open steppes as artillery and thus easily shot to bits. But seeing a fine man, a brave, tough and unyielding soldier cry like a child over them—that did make my tears flow in the night.

On Tuesday I knocked out two T 34s with my mobile anti-tank gun. Curiosity had lured them behind our lines. It was grand and impressive. Afterwards I drove past the smoking remains. From a hatch there hung a body, head down, his feet caught, and his legs burning up to his knees. The body was alive, the mouth moaning. He must have suffered terrible pain. And there was no possibility of freeing him. Even if there had been, he would have died after a

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few hours of torture. I shot him, and as I did it, the tears ran down my cheeks. Now I have been crying for three nights about a dead Russian tank driver, whose murderer I am. The crosses of Gumrak shake me and so do many other things which my comrades close their eyes to and set their jaws against. I am afraid I'll never be able to sleep quietly, assuming that I shall ever come back to you, dear ones. My life is a terrible contradiction, a psychological monstrosity.

I have now taken over a heavy anti-tank gun and organized eight men, four Russians among them. The nine of us drag the cannon from one place to another. Every time we change position, a burning tank remains on the field. The number has grown to eight already, and we intend to make it a dozen. However, I have only three rounds left, and shooting tanks is not like playing billiards. But during the night I cry without control, like a child. What will all this lead to?

36

. . . A year ago, your letter came to a stranger who was alone in this world. I picked it up, and during the long winter days I listened to the heartbeat which spoke to me in it: the heartbeat of the farmers and animals, the plants and the mountain tops, the thunder of the spring storm and the avalanches.

You always wrote that your letters were meant to give the "unknown soldier" stimulation, strength, courage and faith. Today, I have to tell you that I did draw stimulation, strength and even courage from them. But faith—faith in the good cause—is dead, as dead as I, together with a hundred thousand others, will be a month from now.

I am writing you today for two reasons. First, because according to military custom, the unknown soldier to whom you wrote a year ago has to give notice of his departure, which I now do. And second, because I assume that you will now begin to write to a new stranger, so as to give him strength, stimulation, and courage. And faith.

Miss Adi, this is the most important reason. One can perhaps show faith on paper, but if it is, as here in this devastated city on the Volga, put on sale and hawked around; if one realizes as one

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does here, that one's faith in the good cause was time needlessly wasted, then one is bound to warn everybody against persuading another to this faith!

37

. . . They told us this morning that we could write. Just once more, I say, for I know definitely that it will be the last time. You know that I always wrote to two people, two women, to the "other one" and you. And to you most infrequently. I have been very distant from you; Carola was closer to me than you during those last years. We don't want to go over how it happened and why it had to turn out that way. Today, however, when fate gives me the choice of writing to one person only, my letter goes to you, who have been my wife for six years.

It will do you good to learn that the last letter of the man whom you loved is directed to you. I simply could not manage to write Carola and ask her to give you my regards. So I am asking you, dear Erna, in this hour which contains my last wish: be generous and forgive the wrong I have done you in life. Go to her (she lives with her parents) and tell her that I owe her a great deal, and that I greet her through you, my wife. Tell her that she meant a lot to me during these last days, and that I often thought about what would happen after my return home. But tell her also that you were more to me and that, although I am very sad not to be returning home, in a way I am glad to be compelled to take this road, since it will save the three of us ghastly tortures.

Is God greater than fate? I am perfectly composed, but you don't know how difficult it is to say in one hour everything that still needs saying. There is such a vast deal still to be written, but because it is so much, one must know when to stop, take pen from paper and put it away. Just as I now put my life away.

Of my company, only five men are still around. Wilmsen among them. The others are all . . . all grown too tired. Isn't that a nice euphemism for the horror? But what is the point of talking about that now, and what good would it do you to know about it? So keep me alive in your memory as the man who recalled only at the very end that he is your husband and who asks your forgiveness; more, asks you to tell everyone you know, Carola included, that I

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found my way back to you at the moment which will take you away from me forever.

38

. . . I wanted to write you a long letter, but my thoughts constantly disintegrate like houses which collapse under shellfire. I still have ten hours, then this letter has to be turned in. Ten hours is a long time for people who are waiting, but short for those in love. I am not nervous at all. Actually, it is here in the East that I have for the first time become really healthy; I don't have colds and sniffles any more; that is the only good the war has done me. It gave me something else, the realization that I love you. It is strange that people value things only when they are about to lose them. The vast distance is spanned by the bridge from heart to heart. By that bridge I wrote you about our daily round and the world in which we live here. I meant to tell you the truth when I returned, and then we would never have talked about the war again. Now you will learn the truth beforehand, the last truth. Now I can write no more.

As long as there are shores, there will always be bridges. We should have the courage to walk on them. One bridge leads to you, the other to eternity; at the very end they are the same for me.

Tomorrow I shall set foot on the last bridge. That is the literary way of saying "death," but as you know, I always liked to express things figuratively, because I took pleasure in words and sounds. Give me your hand, so that crossing it won't be so hard.

39

. . . Dearest Father, the division has been trimmed down for the big battle, but the big battle won't take place. You will be surprised that I write to you and in care of your office. But what I have to say in this letter can only be said among men. You will transmit it to Mother in your own way. The word is out that we can write today. For one familiar with the situation that means that we can do it just once more.

You are a colonel, my dear Father, and a member of the general staff. So you know what this means, and I needn't go into explana-

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tions which might sound sentimental. This is the end. It will last perhaps another week, I think, then the game's up. I do not want to look for reasons which one could marshal for or against our situation. The reasons are now altogether unimportant and pointless. But if I am to say anything about them, it is this: Do not look to us for an explanation of the situation, but to yourselves and to the man[10] who is responsible for it. Don't knuckle under—you, Father, and all those who think like you. Be on guard, so that a greater disaster does not overtake our country. The hell on the Volga should be a warning to you. I beg you, don't brush off this experience.

And now a remark about the present. Of the whole division only 69 men are still in fighting condition. Bleyer is still alive, and so is Hartlieb. Little Degen lost both his arms; he will probably be in Germany soon. It is also the end for him. Ask him for any details you would like to know. D— has lost all hope. I would like to know what he is thinking at times of the situation and its consequences. We still have two machine guns and 400 rounds of ammunition. One mortar and ten shells. Besides that, only hunger and fatigue. Without waiting for orders, Berg broke out with twenty men. Better to know in three days how things will end, than in three weks. Can't blame him.

And now to personal matters. You can be sure that everything will end decently. It is a little early at thirty, I know. No sentiments. Handshake for Lydia and Helene. Kiss for Mother (be careful, old man, think of her heart trouble), kiss for Gerda, regards to all the rest. Hand to helmet, Father. First Lieutenant — respectfully gives notice of departure.

[10] Hitler.

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ANTHONY HECHT

Behold the Lilies of the Field

And now. An attempt.
Don't tense yourself; take it easy.
Look at the flowers there in the glass bowl.
Yes, they are lovely and fresh. I remember
Giving my mother flowers once, rather like those
(Are they narcissus or jonquils?)
And I hoped she would show some pleasure in them
But got that mechanical enthusiastic show
She used on the telephone once in praising some friend
For thoughtfulness or good taste or whatever it was,
And when she hung up, turned to us all and said,
"God, what a bore she is!"
I think she was trying to show us how honest she was,
At least with us. But the effect
Was just the opposite, and now I don't think
She knows what honesty is. "Your mother's a whore,"
Someone said, not meaning she slept around,
Though perhaps this was part of it, but
Meaning she had lost all sense of honor,
And I think this is true.

But that's not what I wanted to say.
What was it I wanted to say?
When he said that about Mother, I had to laugh,
I really did, it was so amazingly true.
Where was I?
Lie back. Relax.
Oh yes. I remember now what it was.
It was what I saw them do to the emperor.
They captured him, you know. Eagles and all.
They stripped him, and made an iron collar for his neck,
And they made a cage out of our captured spears,
And they put him inside, naked and collared,
And exposed to the view of the whole enemy camp.

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And I was tied to a post and made to watch
When he was taken out and flogged by one of their generals
And then forced to offer his ripped back
As a mounting block for the barbarian king
To get on his horse;
And one time to get down on all fours to be the royal throne
When the king received our ambassadors
To discuss the question of ransom.
Of course, he didn't want ransom.
And I was tied to a post and made to watch.
That's enough for now. Lie back. Try to relax.
No, that's not all.
They kept it up for two months.
We were taken to their outmost provinces.
It was always the same, and we were always made to watch,
The others and I. How he stood it, I don't know.
And then suddenly
There were no more floggings or humiliations,
The king's personal doctor saw to his back,
He was given decent clothing, and the collar was taken off,
And they treated us all with a special courtesy.
By the time we reached their capital city
His back was completely healed.
They had taken the cage apart—
But of course they didn't give us back our spears.
Then later that month, it was a warm afternoon in May,
The rest of us were marched out to the central square.
The crowds were there already, and the posts were set up,
To which we were tied in the old watching position.
And he was brought out in the old way, and stripped,
And then tied flat on a big rectangular table
So that only his head could move.
Then the king made a short speech to the crowds,
To which they responded with gasps of wild excitement,
And which was then translated for the rest of us.
It was the sentence. He was to be flayed alive,
As slowly as possible, to drag out the pain.
And we were made to watch. The king's personal doctor,
The one who had tended his back,

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Came forward with a tray of surgical knives.
They began at the feet.
And we were not allowed to close our eyes
Or to look away. When they were done, hours later,
The skin was turned over to one of their saddle-makers
To be tanned and stuffed and sewn. And for what?
A hideous life-sized doll, filled out with straw,
In the skin of the Roman Emperor, Valerian,
With blanks of mother-of-pearl under the eyelids,
And painted shells that had been prepared beforehand
For the fingernails and toenails,
Roughly cross-stitched on the inseam of the legs
And up the back to the center of the head,
Swung in the wind on a rope from the palace flag-pole;
And young girls were brought there by their mothers
To be told about the male anatomy.
His death had taken hours.
They were very patient.
And with him passed away the honor of Rome.

In the end, I was ransomed. Mother paid for me.
You must rest now. You must. Lean back.
Look at the flowers.
Yes. I am looking. I wish I could be like them.

The Man Who Married Magdalene: Variation on a Theme by Louis Simpson

—Then said the Lord, Dost thou well to be angry?

I have been in this bar
For close to seven days.
The dark girl over there,
For a modest dollar, lays.

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And you can get a blow-job
Where other men have pissed
In the little room that's sacred
To the Evangelist—

If you're inclined that way.
For myself, I drink and sleep.
The floor is knotty cedar
But the beer is flat and cheap.

And you can bet your life
I'll be here another seven.
Stranger, here's to my wife,
Who died and went to heaven.

She was a famous beauty,
But *our very breath is loaned.*
The rabbi's voice was fruity,
And since then I've been stoned—

A royal, non-stop bender.
But your money's no good here;
Put it away. Bartender,
Give my friend a beer.

I dreamed the other night
When the sky was full of stars
That I stood outside a gate
And looked in through the bars.

Two angels stood together.
A purple light was shed
From their every metal feather.
And then one of them said,

"It was pretty much the same
For years and years and years,
But since the Christians came
The place is full of queers.

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Still, let them have their due.
Things here are far less solemn.
Instead of each beardy Jew
Muttering, 'Shalom, Shalom,'

There's a down-to-earth, informal
Fleshiness to the scene;
It's healthier, more normal,
If you know what I mean.

Such as once went to Gehenna
Now dance among the blessed.
But Mary Magdalena,
She had it the best."

And he nudged his feathered friend
And gave him a wicked leer,
And I woke up and fought back
The nausea with a beer.

What man shall understand
The Lord's mysterious way?
My tongue is thick with worship
And whiskey, and some day

I will come to in Bellevue,
And make psalms unto the Lord.
But verily I tell you,
She hath her reward.

Egypt: The Floating Lovers

It was well planned, down to the last detail,
The silks, the silver oars (a luminous touch)
And he fell; as we know; and rejoice for both of them
Quivering like fevered meat there on the Nile.

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And a scent of roses bellied out the sail,
And the blueing at her eye came to mean much,
Came to mean all when the flames licked out and the hem
Of her gold-threaded garment brushed at his blood a while.

And then one evening under a sort of veil
To keep the mosquitoes off, Antinous
Playfully set in his navel a blue gem.
And the Emperor looked at him with a long, sad smile.

The Swan

From the French of Charles Baudelaire

I

Andromache, I think of you. The little stream,
A yellowing mirror that onetime beheld
The huge solemnity of your widow's grief,
(This deceiving Simois that your tears have swelled)

Suddenly flooded the memory's dark soil
As I was crossing the *Place du Carrousel.*
The old Paris is gone (the face of a town
Is more changeable than the heart of mortal man).

I see what seem the ghosts of these royal barracks,
The rough-hewn capitals, the columns waiting to crack,
Weeds, and the big rocks greened with standing water,
And at the window, Their Majesty's bric-a-brac.

One time a menagerie was on display there,
And there I saw one morning at the hour
Of cold and clarity when Labor rises
And brooms make little cyclones of soot in the air

A swan that had escaped out of his cage,
And there, web-footed on the dry sidewalk,
Dragged his white plumes over the cobblestones,
Lifting his beak at the gutter as if to talk,

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And bathing his wings in the sifting city dust,
His heart full of some cool, remembered lake,
Said, "Water, when will you rain? Where is your thunder?"
I can see him now, straining his twitching neck

Skyward again and again, like the man in Ovid,
Toward an ironic heaven as blank as slate,
And trapped in a ruinous myth, he lifts his head
As if God were the object of his hate.

II

Paris changes, but nothing of my melancholy
Gives way. Foundations, scaffoldings, tackle and blocks,
And the old suburbs drift off into allegory,
While my frailest memories take on the weight of rocks.

And so at the Louvre one image weighs me down:
I think of my great swan, the imbecile strain
Of his head, noble and foolish as all the exiled,
Eaten by ceaseless needs—and once again

Of you, Andromache, from a great husband's arms
Fallen to the whip and mounted lust of Pyrrhus,
And slumped in a heap beside an empty tomb,
(Poor widow of Hector, and bride of Helenus)

And think of the consumptive negress, stamping
In mud, emaciate, and trying to see
The vanished coconuts of hidden Africa
Behind the thickening granite of the mist;

Of whoever has lost what cannot be found again,
Ever, ever; of those who lap up the tears
And nurse at the teats of that motherly she-wolf, Sorrow;
Of orphans drying like flowers in empty jars.

So in that forest where my mind is exiled
One memory sounds like brass in the ancient war:
I think of sailors washed up on uncharted islands,
Of prisoners, the conquered, and more, so many more.

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"Je n'ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville..."

From the French of Charles Baudelaire

I remember it well enough, on the edge of town,
That little house, and its quiet, and out in back
The fertile goddesses, naked Venus and so on,
Up to their plaster breasts in wild sumac;
And the sun at evening, flooding the whole place,
Ignited the window with bursting Catherine wheels,
And seemed like a great eye in a prying face,
Watching our mute, interminable meals
And diffusing its votive radiance on all shapes,
On the frowsy tablecloth, the worsted drapes.

Church Bells

From the French of Guillaume Apollinaire

O my dark-headed gypsy boy
You hear how the bells go
We made the two-backed beast of love
Thinking no one would know

But all the bells around the town
Could see our naked fun
And from their perch in steeple-tops
Are telling everyone

Tomorrow Cyprian and Mark
Lawrence upon his grill
The girl who runs the pastry shop
And my own cousin Jill

Will smile whenever I go by
I won't know where to hide
And you'll be gone And I shall cry
And wish that I were dead.

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GALWAY KINNELL

The River that is East

1

Buoys begin clanging like churches
And peter out. Sunk to the gunwales
In their shapes, tugs push upstream.
A carfloat booms down, sweeping past
Illusory suns that blaze in puddles
On the shores where it rained, past the Navy Yard,
Under the Williamsburg Bridge
That hangs face-down from its strings
Over which the Jamaica Local crawls,
Through white-winged gulls which shriek
And flap from the water and sideslip in
Over the chaos of illusions, dangling
Limp red hands, and screaming as they touch.

2

A boy dangles his legs from the pier.
His days go by. Tugs and carfloats go by,
Each pushing a white-cap. On his deathbed
Kane remembered the abrupt, missed Grail
Called Rosebud; Gatsby must have thought back
On his days digging clams in Little Girl Bay
In Minnesota; Nick fished in dreamy Michigan;
Gant had his memories; Griffiths; those
Who went baying after the immaterial
And whiffed its strange dazzle in a blonde
In a canary convertible; who died
Thinking of the Huck Finns of themselves
On the old afternoons, themselves like this boy
Dangling his legs, who sees the Ile de France
Come in and wonders if in some stateroom
There is not a sick-hearted heiress sitting,
Drink in hand, saying to herself his name.

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3

A man stands on the pier.
He has long since stopped wishing his heart were full
Or his life dear to him.
He watches the snowfall hitting the dirty water.
He thinks: Beautiful. Beautiful. Oh Beautiful.
If I were a gull I would be one with white wings,
I would fly out over the water, explode, and
Be beautiful snow hitting the dirty water.

4

And thou, River of Tomorrow, flowing . . .
We stand on the shore, which is mist under us,
And regard the onflowing river. Sometimes it seems
The river stops and the shore flows backwards
Into the past. Nevertheless, its leaked promises
Hopping in the bloodstream, we strain for the future,
Sometimes even glimpse it, a vague, scummed
Thing we dare not recognize, and stare again
At the cabled shroud out of which it came,
We who have no roots but the shifts of our pain,
No flowering but our own strange lives.

What is this river but the one
Which drags the things we love,
Processions of debris like floating lamps,
Towards the radiance in which they go out?

No, it is the River that is East, known once
From a high window in Brooklyn, in agony—river
On which a door locked to the water floats,
A window-sash paned with brown water, a whiskey crate,
Barrel-staves, sun-spokes, feathers of the birds,
A bread-crust, a rat, spittle, butts, and peels,
The immaculate stream, heavy, and swinging home again.

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Flowerherding Pictures on Mount Monadnock

1

I can support it no longer.
Laughing ruefully at myself
For all I claim to have suffered
I get up. Damned nightmarer!

It is New Hampshire out here,
It is nearly the dawn.
The song of the whippoorwill stops
And the dimension of depth seizes everything.

2

The song of a peabody-bird goes overhead
Like a needle pushed five times through the air.
It enters the leaves, and comes out little changed.

The air is so still
That as they go off through the trees
The love-songs of birds do not get any fainter.

3

The last memory I have
Is of a flower which cannot be touched,

Through the bloom of which, all day,
Fly crazed, missing bees.

4

As I climb, sweat gets up my nostrils,
For an instant I think I am at the sea.

One summer off Cape Ferrat we watched a black seagull
Straining towards the dawn, we stood in the surf—

Grasshoppers splash up where I step,
The mountain-laurel keeps crashing at my thighs.

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5

There is something joyous in the elegies
Of birds. They seem
Caught up in a formal delight,
Though the mourning dove whistles of despair.

But at last in the thousand elegies
The dead rise in our hearts,
On the brink of our happiness we stop
Like someone on a drunk starting to weep.

6

I kneel at a pool, I look through my face
At the bacteria I think I see crawling through the moss.

I am seen, the water stirs, the face,
Looking preoccupied, gets knocked from its bones.

7

I weighed eleven pounds
At birth, having stayed on
Two extra weeks in the womb.
Tempted by room and fresh air,
I came out big as a policeman,
Blue-faced, with narrow red eyes.
It was eight days before the doctor
Would scare my mother with me.

Turning and craning in the vines,
I can make out through the leaves
The old, shimmering nothingness, the sky.

8

Green, scaly moosewoods ascend,
Tenants of the shaken paradise.

At every wind, last night's rain
Comes splattering from the leaves.

It drops in flurries, and lies there,
Like footsteps of some running start.

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9

From a rock, a waterfall,
A single trickle like a strand of wire,
Breaks into beads halfway down.

I know the birds fly off,
But the hug of the earth wraps
With moss their graves and the giant boulders.

10

In the forest I discover a flower.

The invisible life of the thing
Goes up in flames that are invisible,
Like cellophane burning in the sunlight.

It burns up. Its drift is to be nothing.

In its covertness it has a way
Of uttering itself in place of itself,
Its blossoms claim to float in the Empyrean,

A wrathful presence on the blur of the ground.

The appeal to heaven breaks off.
The petals begin to fall, in self-forgiveness.
It is a flower. On this mountainside it is dying.

To a Child in Calcutta

Dark child in my arms, eyes
The whites of them just like mine
Gazing with black, shined canniness
At mine like large agates in a billboard,

Whom I held as a passerby
A few stricken days down Bandook Gulli,
While they were singing, upstairs,
Everyone in Calcutta is knocking at my door,

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You are my conqueror!, and you were
Calmly taking in my colored eyes and
Skin burned and thin and
Browned hardly at all by your Bengal sun:

If they show you, when you reach my age,
The blown-up snapshot they took of the stranger
Holding all you once were in his arms,
What will you be able to think, then,

Of the one who came from some elsewhere
And took you in his arms
And let you know the touch of a father
And the old warmth in a paw from nowhere,

But that in his nowhere
He will be dying, letting go his hold
On all for which his heart tore itself
As when they snapped you in his arms like his child,

And, going by the photograph,
That there was this man, his hair in his eyes,
His hand bigger than your whole head,
Who held you when helplessly

You let him, that between him and you
Were this gesture and this allowance,
And he is your stranger father
And he dies in a strange land, which is his own.

In Calcutta, I thought,
Every pimp, taxidriver, whore, and beggar
Doused for me through the alleys day and night;
In Bandook Gulli I came upon you,

On a street crossed by the fading songs
I held you in my arms,
Until you slept, in a stranger's arms,
In rags, in the pain of a little flesh.

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Calcutta Visits

Overhead the fan wobbles on its axle.
In Delhi, on Gandhi's tomb, it said, *Hai Ram* ("an old cry").
On Sudden Street they cry, "Hey Johnny, nice girl?
Indian, Chinese, European? Mixed?"
She taps a fat foot, fools with the phonograph needle,
Finicks with buttons. "No like dance,"
She confesses, collapsing on the carpet, "fookey."
The bird will leave this branch at dawn
And fly away. For one full day remember her:

(And this blue window? this blue, zigzagging street?
"*Five? five* already? ah, den come morning . . .")
A man in white skids towards your knees:
"A morsel! a morsel!" The only city
In the world where the beggars have read Dickens,
Says the Oxford Indian of his first homecoming,
As he sits up there in the Grand Hotel,
Among bribed, sleepy bellhops, drinking himself blind,
While the fan prowls the ceiling as in a zoo.

Floodtime. Cabs practically floating through town.
The driver sizes me up in the rearview mirror
With black, mystical eyes: how exactly to soak me . . .
A Bengal poet, disciple of Tagore,
His tongue flickering through his talk like a serpent's,
Looks from his window on the city. He says
Each day he has to transcend its pain anew.
His face darkens by the window, and gives nothing away.
It is his pain, by the love that asks no way out.

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JAMES WRIGHT

Hung Over

I slouch in bed.
Beyond the streaked trees of my window,
All groves are bare.
Locusts and poplars change to unmarried women
Sorting slate from anthracite
Between railroad ties:
The yellow-bearded winter of the depression
Is still alive somewhere, an old man
Counting his collection of bottle-caps
In a tarpaper shack under the cold trees
Of my grave.

I still feel half drunk,
And all those old women beyond my window
Are hunching toward the graveyard.

Drunk, mumbling Hungarian,
The sun staggers in,
And his big stupid face pitches
Into the stove.
For two hours I have been dreaming
Of green butterflies searching for diamonds
In coal seams;
And children chasing each other for a game
Through the hills of fresh graves.

But the sun has come home drunk from the sea,
And a sparrow outside
Sings of the Hanna Coal Co. and the dead moon.
The filaments of cold light bulbs tremble
In that music like delicate birds.
Ah, turn if off.

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Having Lost My Sons, I Confront The Wreckage of the Moon: Christmas, 1960

After dark,
Near the South Dakota border,
The moon is out hunting, everywhere,
Delivering fire,
And walking down hallways
Of a diamond.

Behind a tree,
It lights on the ruins
Of a white city:
Frost, frost.

Where are they gone,
Who lived there?

Bundled away under wings
And dark faces.

I am sick
Of it, and I go on,
Living, alone, alone,
Past the charred siloes, past the hidden graves
Of Chippewas and Norwegians.

This cold winter
Moon spills the inhuman fire
Of jewels
Into my hands.

Dead riches, dead hands, the moon
Darkens,
And I am lost in the beautiful white ruins
Of America.

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A Message Hidden in an Empty Wine Bottle That I Threw into a Gulley of Maple Trees One Night at an Indecent Hour

Women are dancing around a fire
By a pond of creosote and waste water from the river
In the dank fog of Ohio.
They are dead.
I am alone here,
And I reach for the moon that dangles
Cold on a dark vine.
The unwashed shadows
Of blast furnaces from Moundsville, West Virginia
Are sneaking across the pits of strip-mines
To steal grapes
In heaven.
Nobody else knows I am here.
All right.
Come out, come out, I am dying,
I am growing old.
An owl rises
From the cutter-bar
Of a hayrake.

Depressed by a Book of Bad Poetry, I Walk Toward an Unused Pasture and Invite the Insects to Join Me

Relieved, I let the book fall behind a stone.
I climb a slight rise of grass.
I do not want to disturb the ants
Who are walking single file up the fence post,
Carrying small white petals,
Casting shadows so frail that I can see through them.

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I close my eyes for a moment, and listen.
The old grasshoppers
Are tired, they leap heavily now,
Their thighs are burdened.
I want to hear them, they have clear sounds to make.
They have gone to sleep.
Then lovely, far off, a dark cricket begins
In the castles of maple.

Today I Was Happy, So I Made This Poem

As the plump squirrel scampers
Across the roof of the corncrib,
The moon suddenly stands up in the darkness,
And I see that it is impossible to die.
Each moment of time is a mountain,
And an eagle rejoices in the oak trees of heaven,
Crying
This is what I wanted.

THEODORE HOLMES

The Duck

Without the slightest sign of any motion by his body,
Peddling in the deep beneath him
He moves along a path that is the same in every direction;
The waves his going forward produces like wings,
Soon fade into those that obliterate his way behind him:
He is for the moment only the mark of his passing.

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Like a king in the midst of his subjects,
He is supported by the element in which he moves:
All distance radiates from him;
All human order, the meaning of the things on the shore—
The reason for his going, lie within. The bank he swims
toward,
Where the sky seems to come down to meet his world,
He reaches only to find the earth beneath his feet;
He trails his body along like a loaf of fresh bread,
The curve of his neck rising from the water
Like a signature on music or the stem of a vase.
The waves about him seem to radiate toward the land
Which his adaption to the water so ill-fits him for:
A body that in its bulk sways when he walks;
The large paddles of his feet
Like the thoughts a thinker drags through the world.
There are also the teeth in the bush, the eyes in the dark
That constitute a danger to his presence on land—
Thus contented, he sits nearsighted and afloat;
A thinker without touch, an actor whose destination
Lies as equal as the horizon around him:
He is preserved by the gulf about him.

The Caterpillar

He is almost human in his first condition—
Before there is any perception at all;
Just the vague sensations a worm has
Closed in his dark tunnel of skin:
With his emergence from his birth
He finds what he has been given for a body
Is but a succession of legs—
That, as he crawls, determine the existence
By which he lives from one blade of grass to another.
So, saddened by his beetled head
And the body he drags behind him,

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Built more to feel its movement on its way
Than for any thoughts possible to it
—That are like a world he only dreams of—
He renounces his existence one day
To return to the condition of his birth:
In the darkness he spins about him with his tongue,
The night opens its great wings.

Fall

The wind bends the heads of the trees low—
Sages of the earth trying to keep warm in memories,
Huddled in their wisdom
Drawn like a cloak about them.

* * *

The spring brings out the buds on the branches
So tightly bound up in themselves
With the pressure of their future rising into them,
That the tree still seems bare:

In summer the foliage is so thick on the trees
Their growth only deepens the dark in which they live;
There is perhaps a bird on a nest who sees,
Or the crack where lightning has broken a branch:

It is the first cold winds
That turn the leaves to delicate tints of gold.

On a Journey

I put my feet in the river:
There I enjoy the luxury of feeling them traveled by the road.
All at once I know what love is.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

Etudes de Plusieurs Paysages de l'Ame

I

After the fire came rain.
The burnt-out forest
Hissed quietly; its ash
Foamed in cottony mire.

Sky flowed like protoplasm,
Thinly. The silver face
Of Edgar Poe declined
In the dog-eared West.

We were all very dismal,
But smiled when a baked pig
Danced through the charred twigs
With a blue cup in its mouth.

II

The storm came Monday night. On Wednesday we
Took wreathes to the point and flung them in the sea.

The sun shone, and the waves—oh, how they sparkled!
Even the gulls' shrillness seemed sweet that day.

Sweet, too, the piquancy upon the breeze
Of stranded whale, burnt oil, and ambergris.

III

On a page of the unabridged dictionary
An H was lost. He had come willingly, had bought
His own ticket, his own costume, but now

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The ANNUAL MASKED BALL and the Société
Des Logogriffons seemed too much for him.
Was no one to blame for his shyness and awkward
Manners? Every room, halls and stairways,
The basements and the concealed cells above,
All were crowded with masked figures, graybeards
Of China, lascars, priestesses, troubadours,
Karl Marx, the brilliant Juan, Achilles,
Orpheus in at least thirteen incarnations,
Guinevere and Iseult, the lascivious girls
Of Dublin and Odessa, Tunis and Munich,
Who were, it seemed, as likely as not young men.
And such perfumes! Snuffed candles and wine,
Hot draughts from below bearing fierce bouquets
Of liquor and incense. Laughter flared and fell
In insane arpeggios from curtained recesses.
The lost letter wept secretly; all his desires
Like rain drenched his heart, and the band played
There'll Always Be an England all night long.

IV

Will not the summit offer views
Of all our homelands spread below?
No, no, the fighting winds confuse
Each vision with exploding snow.

I knew a girl who dug a hole
In my poor skull and took my soul.

Only the winds contest this star
Whose death we note with some surprise.
I wonder why we climbed so far
To plant the flag of paradise.

She put a spud in there instead;
A hundred eyes now haunt my head.

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V

Olive trees wrought from crude bronze. The sagged sky
Pebbly and rank, old
Lemon rind. A raped voice abrades the end of day.

Small animals, perhaps lizards and mice, the color
Of clotted blood, play dead.
Will they move when one's not looking, furtive, quick?

Some distance away the sea with great regularity
Clangs the land like a cracked
Gong. In the grass a vermilion plume, leaking.

The voice chafes in time with the sea: "Tell this
To Alcibiades,
We'll raze all Greece before we yield an inch. . . ."

VI

The day I walked from Tampa to St. Pete
The flying fishes swarmed before my feet
Like green grasshoppers. Bits of antic foam
Were daisies nodding in the weeds of home.
The sky's impearled loudspeaker arched the bay,
And Lester Young boomed changes all the day.

VII

At dawn the desert turns to porcelain.
Upon a dune-rim stands a skeletal horse,
Head down, fore hoof cocked, cropping glazed sand.

The stars blanch like goldfish in a frozen pond.
A lizard darts from the F-hole of a violin
That lies in perfect syntax on the sand.

Sunrays set the horse on fire. Behind
A giant cactus a shy Indian screams
Century after century in his death pains.

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PETER DAVISON

Not Forgotten *(In Memory of N. W. D.)*

1. *Watching Her Go*

Drawn by her mumbled wild entreaties,
We gathered helplessly around her bed.
She lolled there, shrunken, grizzled,
Garlanded in feeding tubes, dampened with sweat,
Plucking, when she remembered,
At the dressings from the last operation.
Look! Could she have stirred at the touch
Of my hand? Or was it another wave breaking?
The eyes opened. Pain burst at me
As from a cannon's muzzle.
They closed. Flaccid, fumbling
At the unravelled edge of herself,
She died like an otter sliding into a pond.

2. *Dream*

I stood alone at a funeral. It was up to me
To pronounce the oration. My tongue was knotted fast,
And every mourner rolled his maggot eyes.
The reek of greenhouse flowers pressed on ears
Still filled with Händel's "Largo," while the bright box
Gleamed like a conference table, proof against speeches.
Toward the rear of the chapel, twisting kleenex,
Sat ranks of visitors, urged to stop in on their way
To another appointment by friends who had assured them
This would not take long. It was taking longer and longer.

Who was dead? They expected me to remember.
I had ransacked my pockets twice—no memoranda—
And my Oxford Book of Consolations had vanished.
The penguin crowd creaked folding-chairs impatiently,
So with nothing at all to say, I did what I did:
Danced a very respectful dance on the coffin.
The guest of honor drummed her cold toes
On the underside of the lid.

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3. *Reality*

Have I no right to howl—not even now
When the cradle has been empty and cold for years,
The feeding-bottles broken, the rocking-horse rusted,
The christening-spoon bequeathed to hungrier mouths?
Her friends owned her as well: she had nursed so many.
They came together at last, a crowd collected
To watch the last flutter of a fountain, and turned away
As workmen tramped in to pry up the ancient stones.
But they turn away with a sigh: they cannot howl
Simply because they are not frightened enough:
They have lost a landmark, not a birthplace.

4. *Self-Defense*

What can I say? To hold her hand
  In vigil over her tossing and dozing
Tired me to death. No reprimand
  Of mine could stop the door from closing.

Yet she hoarded each rag of rage,
  Wore it fiercely while she had breath,
Ripped its strands on the bars of her cage,
  And trailed the tatters into death,

Railing at the runaway cell
  That incited a vast malignant race
With one accord to turn cannibal,
  Striking terror into her face.

Her eloquence almost persuaded me,
  When she begged for a noose or a knife
From anyone who would hear her plea
  That the sentence be set at less than life;

But though my eyes can weep no more,
  And day after day is my pursuit,
I swear by the lock upon the door
  I gave no order to execute!

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5. *Aftermath*

The world now has
A gray look to it.
There is much less strangeness
Left in strangers.
Mountains have shrunk,
Trees loom with less shadow,
Even the flavor of fear
Tastes as diluted.

Yet the bloom of your presence
Is absurd as unicorns
Or buttercups at Christmas.
Just as your girlishness
Glanced out daily
From within thickened
Middle-aged flesh,
So does memory
Find you hiding
In a hundred places.
I pray you, do not stray
Farther from us.

CHARLES TOMLINSON

The Barometer

It runs ahead. And now
Like all who anticipate
Must wait. Rain was what
Peremptorily it said and
Rain there is none. The air
As still as it, has dimmed
But not with drops, nor with
That sudden progress—when
All that is not black is green—

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From intensity to purity. Rain
The repetitive, unmoving finger
Still insists, the name
With numerical corroboration under
Its arrow index. The storm
Hides in the stormhead still
That, heaping-over, spreads
And smokes through the zenith, then
Yields to a sordid-white
Identical image of itself
That climbs, collapsing as before.
The glass door reveals
The figured face, the one
Certainty in all these shifts
Of misty imponderables, pale
Seeping pervasions of each tone,
And the baleful finger
Balances, does not record them.

The Chestnut Avenue: at Alton House

Beneath their flames, cities of candelabra
  Gathering-in a more than civic dark
Sway between green and gloom,
  Prepare a way of hushed submergence
Where the eye descries no human house,
  But a green trajectory in whose depths
Glimmers a barrier of stone. At the winds' invasion
  The greenness teeters till the indented parallels
Lunge to a restive halt, defying still
  The patient geometry that planted them
Thus, in their swaying stations. We have lent them
  Order—they, greeting that gift
With these incalculable returns. Mindless
  They lead the mind its ways, deny
The imposition of its frontiers, as the wind, their ally,
  Assails the civility of the facade they hide,
Their green indifference barbarous at its panes.

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HERBERT GOLD

"I Want a Sunday Kind of Love"

DAN SHAPER HAD THE COURT-GIVEN RIGHT to spend Christmas vacation with his children. He drove in this midwinter weather from New York to Cleveland through the wintry length of turnpike—slush and flats of New Jersey, sudden black mountains of Pennsylvania with their marred white tunnels, then slithering down through Ohio foothills—and not a stoplight after Manhattan until he approached Cleveland, his arm still embracing the wheel. He would stop for coffee at a Howard Johnson's, the coffee given by a pimply waitress, and then in the men's room, study the machine which, for an investment of eleven cents, cranked forth the Lord's Prayer engraved on a penny. A dime for labor, one cent for material.

He drove on until, again shaking with fatigue, he stopped at an identical Howard Johnson's, was offered coffee by a girl who had pimples in the same place, and retreated to possibilities for stamping the Lord's Prayer on the same or a similar penny. "Lest We Forget," the placard advised.

Like the famous drowning man, he thought of the ten years of his marriage, but with this difference: The marriage was the drowning and afterwards came the gasping and choking recovery. (Was that an unmarked patrol car behind him? Sometimes they used Edsels.)

Then he thought of Paula and Cynthia, love like lust eating at his belly, and his daughters saying, "Why do you have to stay away so long?" He bit hard into memory as if it were a plum. It was a black rock and his teeth hurt. And then he thought: I need a wife of my own, wife and children with me every day. I need someone standing with me in the mirror. And thought: No other children could replace Paula and Cynthia, who were born of his first youth when he was a skinny boy, amazed himself that he could create plump living flesh.

And then thought: Another coffee, another doughnut to keep him going. At least his stomach could take it. If the limits of love

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had been defined by pride and lust, left and right, his stomach could not still have taken doughnuts; but it still could. There was a new rock and roll version of "Jingle Bells" on the radio. Fathers like him all over the world were flying, driving, training in to claim their visiting rights with their children—their stomachs jerking with excitement, hope and strain in their eyes, love and guilt and pride and an aching foot on the accelerator. Merry Christmas. God rest ye merry, gentlemen. "And now the Chipmunk Song, that newest Christmas classic. . . ."

Shaper switched stations. He was near enough to Cleveland so that the pushbuttons now brought him the stations for which they had been set.

> For he shall reign for ever and ever
> He shall,
> He shall,
> He shall reign for ever and ev-ev-ver.

All over America the fathers were returning to the scenes of their defeat, their abdications, their flight. Some of them were thinking, like Dan Shaper, Thank God I escaped! Thank God! I might have been caught forever! Some of them were thinking, like Dan Shaper: Regret, I should have tried once more, regret forever.

It was the late evening rush hour when he slid into the frayed edges of Cleveland. Neon and colored lights and sudden frosty forests of ripped-up evergreens beckoned to Christmas shoppers, while the men in vacant lots pounded their mitts together and promised "a nice tree, missus." Under a shelter marked in great letters *$2.98!* a woman sold teddybears as large as teddybears ever grow, and she had a portable coal stove to give her good cheer. The light changed; traffic urged him forward, down the outskirt slopes of the Alleghenies which lead into the flattened industrial town. Through the front vents of his car Shaper breathed the chilled exhaust from the tailpipe ahead of him.

If he could arrive at his friend's apartment before eight, he could call Paula and Cynthia. Or he could stop and call from a gas station. But he liked to talk with them, even by telephone, only when he was clean and shaved and combed and the shaking fatigue of the five hundred mile drive eased by a drink. Then he could lounge at his ease through the first breathless words.

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Cynthia, who was eight, would say, "I can say more things in Spanish now! Buenos dios, Senor Daddy!"

"Senor Daddy too! Senor Daddy too!" would come Paula's protesting wail, twenty desperate squirming inches from the telephone.

"Shh, I'll let you talk. Wait till I'm finished, Paula. Daddy?"

"Yes, honeybear."

"We'll be ready tomorrow morning. You pick us up at nine. We'll be out on the front porch." She was very experienced at these arrangements, busy and bustling to get herself and her sister ready, experienced buffer state between her mother and her father.

"Now it's my turn!" came the distant wail.

"Now do you want to talk to Paula?"

"Yes," *he would say.*

"All right, Paula, now you talk."

And as Paula wrestled for the telephone, Cynthia's voice receded, becoming childish once again, all arrangements done, repeating merely: "Daddy. Daddy. Daddy?"

He sighed, emitting frost. He was not yet on the telephone with them. He was four blocks further into the traffic; he had shifted gears four times; he had dreamed again, but it had only gotten him a few hundred yards deeper into Cleveland. There was another lot, festooned with lights, selling rootless and truncated, sap-frozen Christmas trees.

Driving through Cleveland on one of the many nights before Christmas, under fouled industrial skies seen through his greasy windshield, Shaper felt slush under his wheels, a flying soup of snow and dirt and salt, corroding the metal underbodies of automobiles; salt in the greasy air splashed up at nightfall into the traffic, wiping its film across the windshield, rhythmic swish of salt and glass; on the radio, once more God rested his merry Gentlemen, followed by the Chipmunk Song. There were snowed-in, secretly salted sheep in the used car lots. Hunched against the weather and the hurrying shoppers, the 1952 Studebakers and the older Fraziers ($100, nothing down) waited, and the sharp later models waited, too. "GIRLS! ARE YOU HARD TO FIT?" (A shoe store). "Thrill to the Glory of the Open Road!" (A driving school). And the Elbow Bar, the Knick-Knack-Knook, Steve's Place, Steaks and Texas-burgers!

"Don't Ask the Price—You Name It! Everything Goes!"

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Chili! Starlite Food! Day old Baked Goods! (Slightly used apple pies? Shaper asked. Outgrown marshmallow cookies?) Red Hots!

Where was that chicken store he remembered? CAPONS FOR SALE! "What's a capon, Daddy?" Cynthia had once asked him.

Answer: "A capon is a very tender chicken, given special treatment, nice and soft, honey."

At last he reached the apartment of his friend, Martie Grant. Warmth and greetings; this friend always saved his life. There was an amiable steam on the windows. His visits were special occasions; they discussed love and ambition over hot buttered rum. In answer to the question, Dan answered, "I dunno, chappie. Maybe I'm making out."

He had already called and the arrangements were fixed about seeing Cynthia and Paula on their front porch in the morning. He talked with his friend until they both grew drowsy, and then one more hot rum and a couple of salty crackers, and then to the sack. He made out: he fell asleep. That was all right, chappie, when what you need is sleep.

The children, thick in mufflers, were waiting on the porch when he drove up. They had been playing, waiting, talking; cocking their heads, they watched him turn into the driveway as if interested in his style as a driver.

"Hello, Daddy," said Cynthia very shyly.

"Hello, Daddy," said Paula.

He understood and said with shyness equal to theirs, "Hello, children. Let's get into the car."

Then out the driveway, down the street, and around the corner; and then he had to pull over to the side of the curb, crunching frozen snow, when they flung their arms about him, "Oh Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" It was as if they had feared that their mother could see through the walls. But they did not believe, as he sometimes did, that she could follow him around corners with an angry eye. There was now a swarming mass of daughters greeting father, and then tousled, flushed, he patted them both and felt pleased by the happy tears all around.

"Okay. Now what should we do?" he asked.

"Plans!"

"That's right, I have plans. Now listen—"

"What? What? What are we going to do?"

"A trip to the moon for lunch. Then Bermuda. Then a snack.

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Then quickly across two or three oceans for dinner, and then we'll—"

With relieved howls of laughter at so much eating, so much travel, they said, like happy little girls everywhere, "Oh, Daddy! I don't believe you."

"All right, then I'll have to show you."

And he would show them, would, *would*. If he had to take them to both the moon and Bermuda. Focussed on his daughters, he believed that he could infuse them with his energy of feeling for them—right through the snow and ice and his yearning thrust across turnpikes.

"Why are you looking at me, Daddy?"

"I want to look at you, Paula."

"I outgrew the dress you gave me for my birthday already. Mommy says you never buy the right size."

"Tough shit."

"What's that?"

"That's the word for failure to calculate how fast a little girl can grow."

Slowly a smile appeared on her face. She had learned words on the playgrounds already. "Daddy, you're teasing. But when are we going to the television?"

He had promised them a tour at a local television station. It was part of the prolonged animal act of his "visitations"—legal poetry—where he challenged himself to amuse them without going to the movies. He had arranged to watch a local television show, a teenage "dance party" with genuine rock-and-roll celebrities and night club performers doing a spot of afternoon propaganda with the Saturday kids. Two days later it was time and they were having a little meal, their version of oysters, soupe printanière, turbot, sauce Beaumarchais, poulard à l'estragon, macédoine de fruits—in other words, cheeseburgers with malted milk. "Oh, good, good!" said Cynthia, her dewy eyes shining.

"You like my cooking?"

"I like your *ordering*, Daddy," Paula said with great interest in precision. "Gracias, pops!" and she flew up in an infestation of the giggles.

"Tell me about your Spanish class. Do you want some double bubble?"

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"Bubble gum is for babies. We're too big," Cynthia said. "Now give us Chiclets."

"That's what we always have," Paula said. "Sometimes we have sugarless for our teeth."

"Sugarless and chlorophyl," said Cynthia.

Dan nodded solemnly. Paula's malted milk repeated warmly and she grinned. Cynthia was frowning with a sudden thought. "Mommy says you only buy us junk," she said.

"But," said Paula, "but I like your junk."

"Daddy, we like your junk." And Cynthia's smile for him, radiant up toward him. The word *junk* would always be a mystery for her, a beautiful and complicated word, like *serendipity* or *communion*. "Now tell us a story."

"Yes, Daddy. A once upon a time story. . . ."

The story concerned a prince who wanted more than anything else to be loved. Naturally there came a magic potion into the matter, and thus everyone loved him. But the once upon a time prince remained unhappy because the potion had no effect on *him*, since for happiness to come of a love potion, it must above all make the once upon a time prince love those who drink of his potion.

From that dreamy oblivion of the child which is so much like indifference and contains so much caring, Cynthia looked up at her father and said, "I know you do, daddy."

"Know I do what?"

"What you said."

"What did I say?"

She laughed, thrilled because he had forgotten—he had not heard himself—the words had slipped out like his breath. But now he heard, he felt, he even saw himself repeating: "I love you, honeybear."

The waitress in the diner came up and said, "Mister, you must be a teacher to tell stories like that. My brat won't listen to any goddamn thing I tell her."

"My father's a lifesaver," Paula said. "He lives in New York. He knows how to save people's lives."

She had been much impressed by his efforts that summer to teach her to swim; she had overcome her fear of the water. Dan smiled because she remembered so well that he was a junior lifesaver at the age of thirteen.

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"Daddy," said Cynthia, "that magic potion made me hungry."

"*Thirsty,*" her sister corrected her.

"Hungry *and* thirsty, Paula! Can we have, can we have . . . something?"

"Something! Something!" cried Paula.

They ate again, and this time Dan told a magic story that had no love and food in it. It was a poor magic story, of course, but the children did not object, scattering material ketchup and actual rootbeer on formica. They liked his poor magic stories, too, and found food therein.

"You promised to take us to the teevee station."

"Wait till he finishes the story, Paula."

Pout. Reproach.

"I know. I did. I will," he said.

Reversal of pout and reproach. They blinked at so many intentions. "Let's go," he said, and that was easy to understand.

Snowsuits, rubbers, hats, mittens, and a farewell to the nice and nosy waitress who thought it swell that a father took his daughters adventuring on a Saturday afternoon. Then salty slush, feet and wheels, and Shaper put his hand in his pockets to tip the boy who parked his car.

"You give everybody money," Cynthia observed.

"I sure do." But her face was bland. She was not kidding. She had noticed was all.

"Can I have a penny?" said Paula. "For Chiclets? A nickel?"

The Saturday afternoon dance party was a teenage program which featured nightclub stars visiting in town and kids sucking from bottles of pop and dancing the chicken or the fish to records which were put on between the performances, interviews, and commercials. The disc jockey who ran this stew of "live entertainment" was called Fat Ed because he weighed nearly two hundred and fifty long and loose pounds and liked the sound of "Ed." He also wore heavy hornrimmed glasses with a straight wide flange of black plastic on each side, pressing against his ears, pointed shoes which made his fat little feet look like frog's flippers, and a smile like a frog's separating his wide expanse of jowl from an equally generous slab of nose. He was an old acquaintance of Dan's, which in show biz means a lifelong friend or enemy. Since they were not in competition, it was friend and friendly-like. Thanks to this, Dan, Paula, and Cynthia could huddle together beneath the lights

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just out of camera range and watch the party doings. A shuffling band of stage personnel mystified the girls with their rushing of cameras up, their hustling of people to and fro, their muscular chaos of coordinated indecision. "This gets sent into the box at home," Dan elaborately whispered. "You mustn't talk. You can whisper back when I whisper to you. It's what you see in the box."

With florid elegance the deejay introduced Hennery Ford, middle-aged girl singer now appearing at that famous nightspot—"What's the name of that place, doll?"

She told him.

"Reet, Hennery doll. Say, you been in Miami Beach?" She nodded.

"That's great, Hennery, soaking up all those sun vitamins—*Poor old Fat Ed, I have so many heartfelt responsibilities of live* entertainment, I just don't have time—But now this here chick she is man I mean the greatest. You know it, doncha, kids?"

"We know it." screamed the studio visitors, heated by coke and awe.

The hot, stuck deejay wiped the acres of black plastic on his glasses, leaving the lenses fogged. He returned the folded handkerchief to his breast pocket. "Do you *know* it?"

"We *know* it!"

Busily Cynthia whispered to her father something which he did not hear. He answered, "Don't worry, they don't know anything." She smiled quickly, relieved.

"All right!" shouted the deejay. "So now she has chosen to sing for us one of her favorite hit tunes, a religious type love number with a rock and roll beat—it'll live forever, and here's 'I Want a Sunday Kind of Love.' Hennery?"

Microphone, spots, SILENCE, hushed approval, and the sweaty operators rushing cameras in and out. Miss Ford, a wizened, peeling girl of about forty, stood smiling in the light, swaying slightly as her chapped and oiled lips opened over the words:

I want a Sunday kind of love
Like the kind I feel Above
I want a Sunday kind of love
From that One I'm thinking of—

Her mouth stretched over the sounds, her body swayed, the music shrilled forth; but she did not sing. The voice of Hennery

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Ford came from a record while the body of Hennery Ford mimed the gestures of singing.

"What did you say?" Dan whispered to Cynthia.

"But she isn't singing!" Cynthia whispered in shock and horror, discovering another instance of the world's corruption.

"She's very foolish," Paula said primly.

Later Dan would explain to them about idealism—how everybody wanted the song to be perfect, the way Hennery had recorded it originally; about pragmatism—how art is the politics of the possible; about mass media and the way of the world—that's how things are. In the meantime, this eight year old daughter had found public corruption condoned, and some of her disdain was directed against her father. "I want to go *right now!*" she said.

On the way out, Dan explained, "She has chapped lips like that from so much travelling. Maybe she has a cold, besides the change of climate." *Kachoo,* he said sympathetically.

"God bless you," said Paula, sure that her wish was His command. "I don't like that song. I like I'm itchy lak a man on a fuzzy tree, I'm all shook up."

"Paula, that's not right. It's Ah'm itchy *lak* a man on a *fuz*-zy tree, Ah'm all—shook—*up*. Daddy, let's go someplace else and you tell us a story about magic potions."

"Magic potions!" cried Paula.

"Again?"

"Tell it," said Cynthia, grinning, "just by moving your lips and we'll say the words, okay? Paula, what word am I saying?" And her lips squirmed over the enormous adult teeth that always surprised Dan, since it was still baby teeth time when he stopped living with their mother. Her lips, glistening and pink, formed and reformed over the teeth.

Paula watched, peered into her mouth, pulled back, solemnly imitated the gesture, and at last said loud and clear, "Fake! Fake! You were saying fake!"

"That's what my lips were saying," Cynthia said. "But that's what I think of I Want a Sunday Kind of Love and Miss Hilary Ford."

"I guess you're right," said their father, obscurely troubled, as if somehow the children were judging him and putting him on the same side as poor Hennery-Hilary. Adults move their lips to

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music offstage; silently they pretend to sing; and what about Dan's willed gaiety with his girls? And did they not sense how terribly he sometimes flagged, their real father in town for a spree with them? Was he really so enthusiastic about milk shakes (magic potions) and the art museum (fairy tales)?

"It's the way of the world," he said.

"Singing like that?"

"Everything." But Cynthia patted his hand with one of her peculiarly adult, maternal gestures. It was like her salting his eggs. She wanted to be good to him for no purpose but that she was his daughter, and so she imitated the anxious gestures of her mother with that second husband whom she hoped to please and be pleased by. Logic, thought Shaper. (She had dumped a gagging amount of salt over the flattened yolk.) My daughter learns the gestures of love by monkeying around. She broods over my stepwife's gestures with the man who replaced me.

He ate egg. He wiped his mouth. He drank water and took toast. Another snack.

He would have liked a son, he suddenly thought—why? He asked himself why it came to him with such wrenching despair now, when Cynthia was so tender, Paula so sweet with their ideal, often absent, *real* father. All that rose to his mind was an image of the Square Deal Club football team, when at age twelve he had tackled a full-grown boy and, it turned out, broken his collarbone. Glory and shame and sudden hot tears making him sneeze. Well, why not have another child, more children? Why not have a wife again? He called for coffee, the girls called for milk and dimes for the jukebox. Outside the sky had turned black for these last days of the year. It could snow and snow and snow. He held Paula's hand and remembered his own grandfather shaking his hand, holding it, holding to life by an arthritic claw. The way ancient aunts kiss and uncles clutch—he thought—is how I hold my daughters.

It was time to take the children home after this last afternoon of his visit. The sky had clouded over again and there would be fresh snow as he aimed himself toward the highway. "What's the matter, Daddy?" Cynthia asked.

"I dunno, chappie. The weather. I'm sorry I won't be seeing you for another month."

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"But you'll write to us," Paula said cheerfully.

"Yes. Yes."

A look of faint disdain and resentment crossed Paula's face, and her eye just passed to her thumb. No, she would not suck. She was too old for that. She would speak instead. "You don't come to see us often enough, Daddy. Mommy says we should call you Dan, and we should call Mike 'Daddy.' "

"So," said Cynthia, statesmanlike, "we call you Daddy when we're talking to you, because you're our *real* daddy—"

"And Dan," continued Paula like Mister Bones, "when we ask Mommy when you're coming to see us. She don't like us to ask."

"Doesn't," her sister corrected her. "You should say: Mike and Mommy *don't,* but Mommy *doesn't."* She finished this moral and grammatical lesson by putting her finger in her mouth and ferociously pulling at the cuticle with her teeth.

He talked, sang, made rhymes, joked. Paula smiled, but Cynthia huddled against him as he drove. She stared with sleepy cunning at the panel showing gas, oil, speed. Dan parked before their house and told them that he had his suitcase all ready in the trunk. He was spending his last minutes with them, and then he would hurry again toward New York. Then there was silence. Somehow he had asked a question and Cynthia must answer.

She closed her eyes briefly, a gesture of restraint like a much older girl accused. She had a wide unmarked forehead over the struggling lashes. She closed her eyes, planning. Her mother was excellently training her, but she still loved her father, she cared. Her *real* father, as she explained. And since she cared, really cared, this prematurely adult, scheming gesture of closing the eyes did not mean all that it seemed to mean. But still it meant something. She was angry because he was leaving so soon again, she was hurt, she wanted to touch and hurt him, she cared and was confused, she had something important to say, she did not know how to say it. There was an item of information which would have to stand for all this. She opened and closed her eyes once more before she spoke; she squeezed something back into her brain behind the wide, hot, childish forehead. "Daddy," she said, "I didn't get your last letter."

"What do you mean? I'm afraid you don't get all my letters. How do you know about it at all?"

"I just know."

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"What do you mean?"

"Rosalie"—the maid—"she said there was a letter. She said to go get it when I came home from school."

Cynthia shut her eyes again.

"It must have got lost," she said.

Paula said, "I want to go inside." Dan said goodbye to his younger daughter, carried her across the snow to the door, kissed her. The wintry door opened for her; his invisible former wife took her back. Dan climbed back into the car with Cynthia. They sat awhile in thickening silence. "The letters I sent to you are supposed to be given to you," he said.

"I know, Daddy."

And they looked at each other like grownup lovers fleeing parents and family. Child, he thought; child of mine.

"I really love you awfully much, honey."

Impatient and a child again, she said, "I know. Why don't you ever wear black shoes, Daddy?"

"I like brown ones."

"Brown ones?"

Muffled in coats, they sat together in the front seat of the car as if there were more to say. It began to snow in little flakes colored yellow by industrial smoke, ragged-edged, yellow, and faded. The fog of coal and steel and the fog of humid winter held the snow suspended in air, and then let it fall. He ran the motor to keep warm. The snow came down all over the city of Cleveland and when the wiper of Shaper's car worked, it left a smear, wiping the glass back and forth. He sat with his daughter before the house in which his former wife, her mother lived, and explained to her why he wore brown shoes, why he did not wear rubbers, why some singers are fake and don't really sing, why the snow melted faster on the street than on the grass.

"Write to me anyway," she said.

"We'll figure something out, Cynthia."

"Will you?" she asked.

Fresh snow had shadowed his earlier footsteps by the time he took her to the door; evening had come. Half an hour later he was on the highway leading into the turnpike which falls with hardly a pause through three states back to Manhattan. There in the new year he would like to find a wife and have children again.

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JOSEPH KERMAN

American Music: The Columbia Series (II)

READERS OF *Doctor Faustus* will remember Serenus Zeitblom, Adrian Leverkühn's devoted chronicler, as an amateur player on the viola d'amore. This archaic viola has an extra set of strings, the "sympathetic strings," which are not bowed but merely resonate along with the others in order to produce a characteristic silver tone. Can the resonant strings be retuned for every next composer? In writing about Roger Sessions, I invariably incline to a sympathetic aura of solemn terminology: struggle, song, significant form, break-through.[1] Then in turning or tuning to a composer like Aaron Copland, I don't see much use in these terms. In the sense of breaking through, Copland has always been through. At the start of his career he found his individual voice, and in that voice he has been speaking (not singing, I think) ever since—reticently, or good-humoredly, or perfunctorily, or sometimes even noisily. You may not place any value on the particular voice, but it is always Copland. And since he is so much *himself,* it is more than usually pointless to try to classify him as "neo-classic," "traditionalist," etc. This individuality is as hard to explain as it is precious in modern music. It is certainly not the lump result of technical mannerisms; and to say that it indicates some kind of authenticity, on however quiet a level, is to say the very least.

The mannerisms are well known. Copland's ordinary way of extending a piece of music may be illustrated by the excellent opening paragraph of his early *Sextet for String Quartet, Clarinet, and Piano.*[2] A

[1] See the first part of this article (HUDSON REVIEW, Autumn 1958), which deals with Sessions' *Second Quartet* and with the Elliott Carter *Quartet No. 1.*

[2] Modern American Music Series, Columbia ML 4492: Juilliard String Quartet (R. Mann, R. Koff, violins; R. Hillyer, viola; A. Winograd, cello), David Oppenheim, clarinet, Leonid Hambro, piano. With Ellis Kohs, *Chamber Concerto for Viola and String Nonet.* Score published by Boosey & Hawkes. The recorded performance is first-rate. If sometimes the music still comes out stringy and thin, and oddly powerless to sustain its own tension and lyricism, it is my impression that the fault lies not in the playing nor in the piece, but in the arrangement: this *Sextet* is a transcription of a *Short Symphony* written in 1932-33. One look at the score of the *Symphony,* and you never want to see the *Sextet* again.

Apparently Copland made the transcription because he despaired of ever hearing the symphony performed. In his book on Copland, Arthur Berger writes: "In the United States the work gathered dust on the shelf until 1944, when Stokowski and the National Broadcasting Company Symphony gave it its only performance in this country to date [1953]. It was, however, presented by Chávez, in 1934, and twice more since then, in Mexico. . . ." In the last few years the *Symphony* has been played about twice again in this country, and published by the English firm, Boosey & Hawkes.

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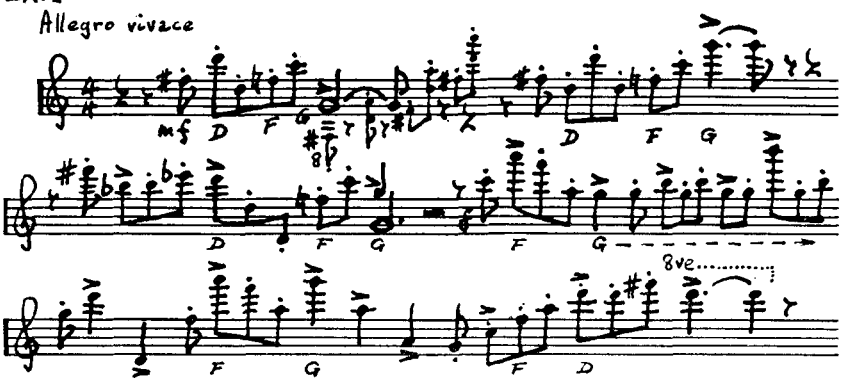
progression of three triads (D—F—G) is spread out in a spurt. Then this basic idea comes twice more, briefly expanded so as to complicate the rhythm by irregular groupings of twos and threes. Then rhythmic excitement takes hold around a single chord. Meanwhile, the abrupt pauses between repetitions of the basic idea have left place for musical parentheses (indicated in Example 1 by small notes around the first long

EX. 1

G only; the figure returns twice more). In other words Copland works with a sort of stretching ostinato, punctuated by contrasting material stretched in somewhat the same way. Arthur Berger has called this technique "nuclear expansion."

In the present instance, Copland backs out of the situation with characteristic aplomb, by reversing his progession and landing conveniently on the dominant; elsewhere these passages are likely to be cut short with little ceremony. And often the parentheses are longer and more melodic, as well as more seriously polytonal, than the simple dominant arpeggios superimposed on the tonic here.

Now all this makes for firm, exuberant exposition, to which nobody could possibly object except on the basis of some general phobia of clear-cut tonal centers. However, it is a question whether the technique will bear all the weight that Copland wants to put on it for transition, development, and practically anything else. Right away in the *Sextet,* for instance, two more such constructions follow: for an important theme which augments the first part of the original idea (D—F), played twice with a curt E-flat interruption between; and a few bars later, for another idea, consisting of a loud A-major chord moved up an octave —stated three times with parentheses on D, F, and B-flat. This leads to another time through the whole opening paragraph . . . and so it goes. In the second movement, too, even the pathetic little scale of the main theme is reiterated rather than developed. The second theme is expanded at length. "Nuclear expansion" is carried furthest with a boisterous fragment of tune in the Finale, a movement that also makes

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much of another but similar device: the ostinato passage whose ingenious, invigorating rhythmic activity keeps a single harmony alive. The first movement had contained a charming lyric passage built on the augmentation theme in this way.

Indeed Copland leans so heavily on "nuclear expansion," and on methods much in the same spirit, that the listener can hardly fail to become aware of limitations. Lively but a little simple-minded, and (what is more important) fundamentally static, the technique seems to rein the music back impatiently from strong movement. Under these conditions, what can we make of the overall sense of cohesion, progress, or form? Any analysis of bonds between musical style and form is problematic, and problematic in some proportion to the seriousness of the composer's intention. As I have suggested, judgments in this area must stay mainly intuitive—and risky. All the same, with Copland the sense of structure does seem to resemble the sense of its moment-to-moment activity. Eager but fitful, this music, in the large, gives the impression of high energy and high spirits without strength, exercise without impetus, gesture without motion. Stravinsky comes to mind, perhaps more strongly with this *Sextet* than with any other Copland piece, but Stravinsky has always been sterner and finer, both more unapproachable and more brilliant. Unlike Stravinsky, Copland lets himself take a certain ingenuous joy in rhythmic activity for its own sake: he thinks of music as a shy dance (and at some slight risk of sentimentality, we may think this very American of him). Copland is less of a melodist than Stravinsky, moreover. If Stravinsky seems determined to renounce conventional effects of climax, Copland lacks any such inexorable purpose. Yet he never achieves even the monolithic weight that Stravinsky's early music could gain simply by blank force of repetition.

Apart from what is perhaps ultimately the crucial question of power, the *Sextet* is efficiently and tightly made, with never a dead spot. In the first movement, that original harmonic cell D—F—G generates the entire piece: after the augmentation idea takes over half of the cell (D—F), the chord idea turns into something that absorbs the other half (F—G: major triads a tone apart.) Nothing arbitrary, either, about the laconic parentheses within the first statements of these ideas: E-flat and B-flat prefigure later directions in the tonal plan. But although Copland's gestures on a larger scale almost always convince, it curiously doesn't seem to matter that they do; form is not "significant" as I have been using the term, but instead "adequate," adequate to keep the piece going for its modest sixteen minutes. Thus the return of the first-movement themes at the end of the Finale sounds perfectly right and at the same time uneventful. Compare this easy success with the analogous return at the end of Carter's *Quartet No. 1,* where the composer has tried for something more meaningful and failed; and compare Sessions, who throughout his *Second Quartet* strives for formal significances and achieves them.

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Copland's *Sextet* dates from the "serious" period of his early career. After the brilliant orchestral works of his debut years in the 1920's, and before the familiar ballets and such using folk material of the later 1930's, Copland went through his time of stern purely-musical preoccupation. The *Piano Variations* were composed in 1930, the *Short Symphony* (No. 2) in 1932-33; the latter was then transcribed almost exactly as the *Sextet*. In its original form as a symphony, it remains I think the very best of Copland's early work: always interesting, never over-written, terse, bracing, neat, unpretentious, anxious to be liked and instantly likeable, musical to the bone. The note of reserve in this recital damns both ways, perhaps: damns not only Copland but also those who find his music in the last analysis unsatisfying. What more do we want of our composers? More of an emotional commitment, principally; more of a sense of engagement. It is hard to avoid the impression that Copland is skating over the actual depths that we know can be sounded in a musical composition. (We know from the musical tradition *passim*, and we are reminded by contemporaries of Copland like Carter and Sessions—composers who could not be faint-praised in the above terms, maybe, but who don't skate: they travel or they plough or they try.) As an entertainment craft, figure skating is honorable enough, but not as a serious means of locomotion—it scarcely marks the ice; and Copland is no all-out virtuoso, like Stravinsky, who can dazzle even on his drier excursions. Copland's music hints at the depths sufficiently to cause concern about its surface sheen, its motor preoccupation, its powerlessness. We want him to break into the ice.

As though the sonata were to ask Fontenelle: *philosophe, que me veux-tu?* We want the composer to do more than worry his material, even if it is brisk, seemly, excellent worrying. Perhaps we want him to worry in the other sense of the word: to worry, and to worry us.

There is a genre, however, in which the restricted conception of large-scale structure might not matter, and in which emotional deflection, if that is what it is, might be minimized. This genre is the song; a simple lyric states or understates, it does not develop or probe. Actually Copland had written next to no songs prior to 1949-50, when he set *Twelve Poems by Emily Dickinson* as a song cycle for soprano and piano.[3] With only a token effort to unify the whole, musically or poetically, Copland put together a selection of short lyrics, including some good ones, some poor ones, and many corrupt texts, as we can now tell for sure from Thomas A. Johnson's edition of Dickinson. Some of the Dickinson songs I should consider as finer than anything Copland had ever done before. Others, on the contrary, dilate on faults previously unknown.

[3] Columbia ML 5106: Martha Lipton, mezzo-soprano, with Aaron Copland, piano. With Hugo Weisgall, *The Stronger*. The cycle is published by Boosey & Hawkes. Copland's performance is definitive, in the double sense of definite and defining: teaching the life and beauty of the piece. Miss Lipton understands the piece, and stands away from it.

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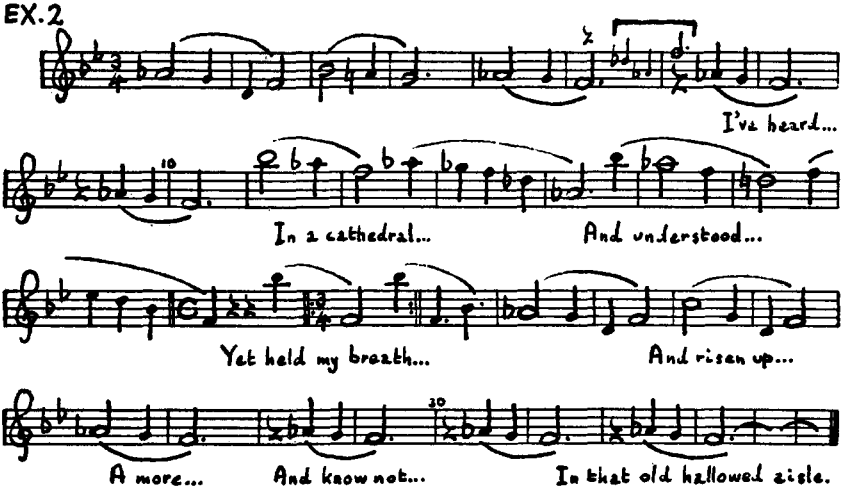
From the standpoint of Copland's ordinary style, the songs are remarkable in their almost total absence of obvious rhythmic effects and of folk-like tunes and fragments. We can agree that these would have been out of place in the Dickinson world, and appreciate the delicate vestiges that remain. Also, we may reflect that these style characteristics were never really integral, but rather contingent on architectural aims in large-scale works. The style of the Dickinson songs has been refined to an unusual simplicity; a pit for critics who regard complexity as a *sine qua non* if not a guarantee of contemporary probity.

The tenth song, "I've heard an organ talk sometimes," a song so tiny that it can be sketched complete as my Example 2, would be hard to

EX. 2

beat for simplicity of harmonic and formal plan. The harmony actually rests on root-position triads, in which, I take it, we are to hear a reedy echo of the harmonium in the Amherst church. The general formal plan is that of Schubert's *Der Doppelgänger:* an ostinato figure in the piano and a subsidiary declamatory line in the voice, both working towards a final climax. The ostinato is managed quite in the manner outlined above, with the guiding piano part dwelling on a three-note cell, A-flat—G—F—although at first the descent is broken, and then moved up a step, before achieving its pristine form. In the middle of the song the figure expands with marvelous flexibility and breadth, and by the way, also mirrors itself beautifully in the bass. At the end of the song the figure grows obsessive, if so small a piece may be said to be obsessive. As for the polytonal "parenthesis," it is marked in the example at bars 6-7 only, but recurs in bars 4, 8-9, 10, 27-28, 29-30, 31-32, 33-34, 34-35; which is to say, it stops in the middle but grows stronger and stronger at the end. So does the vocal line—by spinning out the last verse on a bold chiming arpeggio, from the highest to the

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lowest note of the tessitura in flowing eighth-notes. Harmonically too the song gains great emphasis at the end, for Copland clouds the harmonic interpretation of his basic cell until at last it stands out nakedly as a thundering plagal cadence: the bass D-flat—E-flat—B-flat. So everything combines to transform the Amherst reed-organ image into a sudden vision of tolling bells; yet they are no steeple bells swinging dangerously with clappers, but tubular chimes struck invisibly, and immobile so far as one can see—although in actual fact they vibrate hugely around a multitude of nodes. That indeed is the kind of chiming, if any, in Emily Dickinson's strait quatrains.

In a moment I shall say more about Copland's naked way with triads. Plain triads, however, seldom form the basis of his style. Generally in these songs, and regrettably, he relies on triads disguised by other notes (added sixths, sevenths, even fourths and seconds but no sharp dissonances). As a serious resource, these chords attracted attention around the turn of the century for their sonorous value in impressionist music, but of course they were already perfectly familiar, mostly from their use to "register" soft opulence in bad operatic music. (Also in some good operatic music.) The extra notes add facile, weakly decoration, contributing nothing functional; and such chords are notorious today in popular music, which has a proper horror of an unsmeared triad. While a song like "The world feels dusty" may perhaps find its rationale in a sonorous idea, Copland is really no impressionist. The piece is enervated by steady use of triads blurred just up to the point where they might become dynamic.

Copland has an excellent ear for colloquial American speech. When this operates together with harmonic clichés now associated with Tin Pan Alley, the result is predictable—and while the conjunction of Emily Dickinson with a torch song is at first blush a startling one, it must be granted that some of her diction would not seem strange on a modern song sheet. At least she lacked fair warning; Copland, however, knows Hollywood and Broadway; his setting of lines such as

> Wouldn't the angels
> Try me just once more

is hardly calculated to recommend him in Dickinson circles.

Added-sixth and seventh chords present a further temptation in the fatal ease with which one can slide up and down the scale with them. The effect is always plausible, always mindless and spineless. Perhaps Copland carries it off in the opening song of the cycle, "Nature, the gentlest mother," in which for more than half the time we are slipping down the scale in parallel six-seven chords, but are just saved by cunning chatter in the right hand—a thin clear rhapsody to Emily's impetuous bird and rampant squirrel. The longest slide, through no fewer than eight degrees, brings us nonetheless to solid ground, on an excellent airy trill. The song is gently buttressed on both sides by

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lullaby sounds. "When they come back," a very elegant piece of workmanship, uses drifting chords appropriately enough to build its theme, seemingly so casual; but to have the central climax drift in the same way is tawdry, and the coy ending is just as hard to take in Copland's music as in Emily Dickinson's verse. In "Heart, we will forget him," the slipping chords are, frankly, obnoxious. These Broadway accents came to dominate the lyric sections of Copland's recent opera, *The Tender Land,* in which he seems to have made the capital error of writing down to an audience assumed to be receptive to *Oklahoma!* The resulting shallowness cannot be helped by many musical details that are certainly finer than anything likely to be found in other new American operas. *The Tender Land* reflects back unpleasantly on the Dickinson cycle.

The problem of movement is doubtless a sensitive one for all composers. For Copland, I suspect it is more like an open nerve. This constant moving up and down the scale on parallel chords seems an attempt to meet the problem. Actually it evades the issue—and I should say the same, by the way, of Copland's serial writing in the *Piano Fantasy* of 1956 (a very impressive work nonetheless, whatever may be evaded).[4] The Dickinson songs use and over-use another, more sensational device which seems again to have musical movement as its real goal, if not perhaps as its obvious motivation. "Triad jumping" we might call it: while proceeding in one key and with an ordinary decent amount of dissonance, the music jumps without warning to a half-remote triad—carefully exposed, and usually exposed quite nude. Such progressions bring up the question of decorum even more urgently than the smear chords, which are wrong nine times out of ten. For it is obvious, given Copland's harmonic texture, that he cannot write a prominent bare triad unselfconsciously, as Bach, Mozart, or even Wagner could. The triad must always connote deliberate, blinding naivety. The line—always delicate—between ingenuous and disingenuous may in this case seem not worth the trouble of the drawing, for at best the effect is admittedly rather special. The effect has its place, however. In dealing with Emily Dickinson's poetry, many occasions arise for sudden darts of innocent-seeming penetration.

Something a little similar may be observed in the poetry itself. Emily Dickinson had a liking for sudden shocks of purple:

> I've heard an organ talk sometimes
> In a cathedral aisle,
> And understood no word it said,
> Yet held my breath the while,

[4] One of the best things written about Copland is a recent essay discussing the serial compositions in relation to his earlier work: Peter Evans, "The Thematic Technique of Copland's Recent Works," *Tempo,* No. 51, Spring-Summer 1959.

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And risen up and gone away
A more Bernardine girl,
And know not what was done to me
In that old hallowed aisle.

Bernardine flickers pretty aimlessly here. Cathedral? abbey? virgin? conversion? compline? St. Bernard? Copland, in his setting, sensibly leaves the image alone. Emily is better off in gentian:

I meant to find her when I came,
Death had the same design,
But the success was his, it seems,
And the surrender mine.

I meant to tell her how I longed
For just this single time,
But Death had told her so the first
And she had past, with him.

To wander now is my repose,
To rest, to rest would be
A privilege of hurricane
To memory and me.

Hurricane acts to focus the complexity, to justify the drab poem without dropping it in the paint pot; a single image warming the whole.

Abrupt triad plunges jut out in some of the songs, just as loose images do in some of the poems. In quality they range from stock purple ("Heart, we will forget him") to gentian ("The Chariot"). In "Sleep is supposed to be," things are more precarious than ever because the effect sought is apocalyptic; but in "The Chariot"—it is the last song in the cycle, and refers back to "Sleep is supposed to be"—everything focusses purely within the sphere of feeling defined by poem and music. In this piece, triad moves on the words "immortality" and "civility" stress the tenseness in them, the Victorian amalgam of formalized innocence; and the move on the phrase "We passed the setting sun" causes (instead of the apocalyptic pinks and oranges of the earlier song) a rich concentrated glow, into which Copland moves unhesitatingly, with full responsibility. Apart from their local expressive force, however, these jumps produce all the harmonic action; which is to say, they alone determine the sense of progress, the sense of form. This song is free of slipping chords. A compositional plan consisting of tonal plateaus sharply joined — this recalls Stravinsky, once again. It differs in the distinct effect of innocence that Copland seeks at the joints.

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In Example 3, which hopes to represent the form of "The Chariot"

EX. 3

through the tonal dynamic, arrows indicate the triad jumps, white notes the tonal plateaus, and black notes subsidiary levers, hinges, sonorities, feints, and so on. After a mournful dry page of Dorian harmony on B (adumbrating A) the sudden move to A ("immortality") carries the music quietly to the subdominant, E—in the Dorian mode, a rather poignant relationship. Another such move ("civility") prepares C#. Here the music moves as though to sequence towards a climax on the dominant, with strong melodic pressure from G to F#; but things are darkened by the triad jump to D# ("the setting sun"), and again to D ("The roof . . ."). Then G is brought back delicately so that it may now resolve towards the tonic. As a whole, the harmonic movement in the song has been deliberate but very sober, coherent, stately, certain: qualities supported by Copland's fine motivic manipulation. The opening dotted-note motive is retained only as a background, half-heard, during the second section (in E); after being reinstated and then reinforced at the climax, the motive fades with the sun. Melodically, it grows curiously vacant and taut, and rhythmically, it pulses, slows, and attends. In the last section the rhythm dies entirely, in numb little spasms. The opening motive re-echoes only after the voice has climbed to rest on its high cadence note, "toward Eternity."

In the Dickinson cycle, as elsewhere, the worst poems have often inspired the worst songs, and the best the best. "The Chariot" is a perfect song, the true article—well, *almost* perfect, we had better say, for the poem is even finer in the Johnson version. Copland's image of "gazing grain" on a spread seventh is a musico-poetic intiution of genius. So is his free canon as "we slowly rode": the gentle relentless creaking of carriage springs.

When one feels in this way that a song composer has been able to match and even enhance his poet, one also feels driven to inquire into the bond between them, even though they are artists in different media and, as often as not, in different centuries. However coarse, the examination may reveal something about either one of the persons—and anyhow, the composer has practically invited the examination, for in addressing himself to the poet he makes (let us hope) no mere indiscriminate assault, but some kind of declaration of intimacy. For both Copland and Emily Dickinson, the crux of ingenuous–disingenuous is centrally important, though for each of them it bears a rather different complexion. Emily Dickinson, slamming the door literally on

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poetic tradition and contemporary verse, worked away at hymn accents recalled from church-going days as a child. She was ready to make drastic sacrifices of her personal life and of her proper professional vocation, so urgent was her need for innocence. Copland on the other hand not only knows well what is going on around him, but has assumed a conspicuous role in the contemporary music scene. Our musical shut-in was Charles Ives. To the extent that Copland eschews current sophistication, he rejects it deliberately; the act of renunciation is conscious and self-conscious.

He is no William Billings; yet of course, Emily Dickinson is no Isaac Watts either. Innocence of diction and meter served as a frame for a highly personal vision of excruciation, which at her best she achieved in poetry by asserting direct, piercing feeling in a deceptively childlike context. Naivety for Emily Dickinson, as R. P. Blackmur has so well shown, went as far as naivety of intention and technique: "With no criterion of achievement without there could be no criterion of completion within. Success was by accident, by the mere momentum of sensibility. . . . The only weapon constantly in use is, to repeat once more, the natural aptitude for language; and it is hardly surprising to find that that weapon, used alone and against great odds, should occasionally produce an air of frantic strain instead of strength, of conspicuous oddity instead of indubitable rightness."[5] If self-limitation was an artist's sin, it would be so for Emily Dickinson as well as for Copland. She was just previous about it and more efficient.

However limitation *per se* is no more terrible than traditionalism—in the use of bare triads, for instance, which as we have seen may be justified and dignified by context. The class-room cadence at the end of "I've heard an organ talk sometimes" comes as an elegant, perfectly calculated consequence of the postulated overall style; and Copland has quite as much license to evoke nineteenth-century American church music as Alban Berg had to evoke eighteenth-century German church music or Stravinsky fourteenth-century French. But to return: the only question about self-limitation, as about traditionalism, is what it gains the composer. Copland lacks Emily Dickinson's excruciation; we could stand a little of that frantic strain and conspicuous oddity. How often, we have a right to ask, does this composer grant himself the privilege of hurricane? Hurricane bursts out at us from "There came a wind like a bugle," another excellent song on an excellent poem; for a moment real steeple bells whirl—but it passes by in a flash, an electric storm, a sport. Too often instead there is deflection and what amounts to an announcement of withdrawal. This can lead to banality, as these songs remind us now and then, and as the Dickinson works also remind us. Sensibility and the hurricane remain, and we may come to feel that Copland is being frank and not so frank: that he is more forthright about parading his reticence than about sentiment it-

[5] From "Emily Dickinson: Notes on Prejudice and Fact" in *Language as Gesture.*

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self. Urbanity cuts both ways: Copland relinquishes the spontaneous vision sometimes achieved by Emily Dickinson. On the other hand, urbanity guarantees adequacy at least to his form: Mr. Blackmur's rather frightening pastime of juggling around verses and stanzas in Dickinson would not work with this music. Copland is a more correct artist, as well as a less exciting one.

A natural aptitude for language: which Mr. Blackmur arrives at from this direction:

> . . . the speech-tone of authority, a directness in the manner of the words which has nothing to do with their meaning, and the speech-quality of speed, an inner speed of the syllables like the inner velocity of an atom, which has nothing directly to do with the outward relations of the words. These qualities are characteristic of verse that is felt as actual; at least we say that these qualities exist in verse that exacts the sense of precise feeling in the reader. Perhaps it is simpler to say that there is an excitement in the language beyond the excitement of any meaning we can communicate through any medium different from that of the poem itself: the excitement of being. It is gained, that excitement, by the exercise of the fundamental technique of language as a mode of finding objective form for even the most abstract feelings.

An analogous natural aptitude for music—what we tend to call lamely "musicality"—Stravinsky has to the highest degree; Copland has it less, but still more than any other major American composer, or so I feel. The same is true of that authentic voice which we began with, and which involves musicality without being quite the same thing. These feelings about Aaron Copland grow as one hears his work along with others', along with the 43 pieces of chamber music by 38 composers that comprise Columbia Records' American Music Series.

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SONYA RUDIKOFF

Art Chronicle: Great American Painters

ALTHOUGH MANY PEOPLE MAY PREFER to see realism as the representative American tradition in painting, the American art which has been so profoundly significant is our abstract painting of the last ten or fifteen years. Interestingly enough, the resonance of this achievement has allowed for a more sympathetic understanding of the whole American painting tradition, an understanding less polemical, less limited, less defensive than before. American art is no longer blown up and overrated to compare with European models, and the American scene is not accepted or rejected so ferociously as it was in the past. One of the examples of this new enlarged understanding may be found in the Braziller "Great American Artists Series," which made its debut last year with books on Winslow Homer, Eakins, Ryder, Stuart Davis, de Kooning, and Jackson Pollock.[1] These are not massive and costly library volumes but, rather, compact books, reasonably priced, well-produced, appearing in hard cover and paper. Each provides more than eighty reproductions, sixteen of them in color, and includes an essay on the painter of eight to ten thousand words, a chronology of his work, a selected bibliography, and, in the Eakins and Ryder books, additional notes on matters not covered in the texts.

The working lives of these painters, from the 1860's to the present, coincides with America's development as a modern, industrial, major country, and it is therefore of interest to note that none of them is the type of expatriate painter: Whistler, Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sargent, for example, suggest a very different style. In contrast, all of the six painters are significantly marked by their *separation* from Europe; although de Kooning was born in Holland, and Davis was close to the School of Paris, neither has made his career European; Ryder, Eakins, and Homer spent time in Europe but did not stay there, and their work was not done in the light of a primary European reference. Indeed, Lloyd Goodrich, in his essay on Homer, is concerned to point out how Homer came to *his own* impressionism and did not import Monet's. And Pollock's first teacher was Thomas Benton. But, these painters are nevertheless not "American" in the sense usually reserved for Benton, Grant Wood, The Eight, or Grandma Moses. Their importance for our painting tradition lies rather in the authenticity of their American encounter with both the history of art and the American scene.

1 WINSLOW HOMER, by *Lloyd Goodrich;* THOMAS EAKINS, *by Fairfield Porter;* ALBERT P. RYDER, by *Lloyd Goodrich;* STUART DAVIS, by *E. C. Goossen;* JACKSON POLLOCK, by *Frank O'Hara;* WILLEM DE KOONING, by *Thomas B. Hess.* George Braziller Inc. $3.95 each.

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Certainly when one thinks of Courbet, Manet, Degas, Boudin, Renoir, Monet, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Seurat, Cézanne—that brilliant company!—one would have to be strangled in the folds of the national banner to assert that Eakins, Homer, and Ryder achieved anything of comparable significance for painting itself, although they achieved something for American painting. But these matters are too often argued as if there were some race to Parnassus and the Americans had to "catch up," as if it were a sign of provinciality that this country did not have a sophisticated art in its early history. The fact of separation from Europe is thus not given its due weight as a cultural event, and false comparisons are pursued. The Americans did not revolutionize art in the way the *idea* of America revolutionized thought. But the reasons for this may be found much more in the ambiguity of our nineteenth century culture than in the commercialism and public vulgarity which are usually offered as explanations. Surely the Second Empire, which saw the rise of Manet and of Impressionism, was not noted for its lack of vulgarity! In fact, wherever there has been great art, there has always been a powerful commercial culture and an equally powerful vulgarity of public life. And who would say that the eminence of American painting today signifies any decline in commercialism and public vulgarity?

More important is the fact that our nineteenth century still had cultural tasks, themes to explore, a whole definition of form and place to investigate, a form-language to articulate. Realism could be revolutionary for Homer and Eakins in a way that differed from Courbet's, and so they had to do other things than Manet did. If Ryder is a kind of "sport," it is not as Redon was; Ryder is much closer to American folk art and also more abstract in relation to the future of American painting than Redon was in relation to French painting. Furthermore, it is necessary to remember—and never more so than in this kind of discussion—that if art is in some ways cumulative, like science, it is also in other ways discontinuous, individual, differentiated, in the same degree as human life.

The books which present six of our major American painters are of varying interest, quality, and value, but I would recommend all of them for their plates. The essays are another matter. Perhaps all of them cover too much ground in eight thousand words, and so at times seem to be merely expanded chronologies, not quite *about* anything. None of them is, as an essay, a significant scholarly or intellectual achievement. None of them is quite so interesting as the art it points to. Lloyd Goodrich has already done a major work on Homer (and will do one on Ryder); in this brief treatment of Homer he is necessarily more limited. His method is straightforward, historical, biographical, and presents Homer as an American epic poet of the sea who "did for our painting what Walt Whitman did for our poetry—he made it native to our own earth and air." One feels a certain qualification and

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demurrer about this national self-image. Homer's isolation reinforces it, but as a painter he is actually least interesting in his epic marine oils and much more so in his spare, dry, abstract water-colors. And he himself once said that he thought he would live by his water-colors.

Fairfield Porter, a painter and critic, presents an Eakins of extreme conscientiousness, whose naturalism was adopted scientifically as a liberation from tradition and the picturesque. Eakins once said "Respectability in art is appalling"; his portraits did not flatter the sitters, he observed of a Whistler that it seemed "a cowardly way to paint"; Whitman said of him "Eakins is not a painter, he is a force." Mr. Porter is interested in Eakins' use of art "to express an American sense of life that was essentially anti-artistic," in the Eakins who was "rejected in his lifetime because society could not forgive him for accepting it as it was, instead of offering it a picture of something better." Again one hears the sound of the national self-image, which perhaps obscures other things, as it seems to have done for Eakins himself. There is a poignancy about Eakins which is magisterial, not only because his contemporaries in Paris were exploring more advanced pictorial problems with more pleasure, but even more because for Eakins himself rational naturalism does not seem to have been adequate for what he could or wanted to do.

With Ryder, one is especially happy to have the plates, because the work of this painter is difficult to see: most collections have only a few examples, most of them are in terrible condition, and his entire production amounts to only one hundred and fifty or sixty pictures. There are in fact five times as many Ryder forgeries as originals, and Lloyd Goodrich, who has made a special study of this, includes an interesting note on Ryder forgeries, how they are done and how they may be detected. Ryder was an instinctive, imaginative, visionary painter who seems not to have been disturbed by the realist scruples and principles that bothered Eakins. Nor did he express much interest in the work of his contemporaries or in the old masters; he spoke about Corot. He did not paint portraits or scenes from American life but, instead, those mysterious boats under strange skies, or Death riding around a race track, or Siegfried and the Rhine maidens, Macbeth and the witches, the Forest of Arden, King Cophetua and the beggar maid. He was an original, an expressionist without modern color, whose sense of form was very sure and very abstract.

These painters were all born in a nineteenth century which was obsessed with both the age of the continent and the newness of America, with a dialogue between hope and history, with the unprecedented example of an ambiguous culture, with the theme of separation from Europe. All of this found expression in our literature, but there is good reason to think it was expressed in our form-language as well, and perhaps *that* sense isn't communicated in the essays. Inevitably, there is that other sense, that tendency to view American culture of the nine-

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teenth century as "provincial," as if this were a definition when it was and is in fact an adjective out of the very dialogue in which this culture engages.

In the three essays on modern painters, possibly the brilliance of American painting has so dazzled the writers that they are tempted to very ambitious statements. They address their remarks to so large and varied an audience that the essays seem intended for no one at all. In Mr. Goossen's discussion of Stuart Davis, this uncertainty appears in the highly sophisticated analysis of Davis' composition, calligraphy, relation to cubism, combined with laboured and pedestrian definitions and identifications—of "commitment," the Fauves, Hokusai ("Japanese artist"!), of the Armory Show, of Gorky and Marsden Hartley, of abstract expressionism, and so on. There is also a curious and unpleasant defensiveness, not any longer with reference to Europe, but now against other American painters, as if Davis required apologies because he isn't an abstract expressionist! In this distortion I miss some discussion of one of Davis' most significant and valuable qualities, his wit, which is not simply a general characteristic of his imagination, but is a specific quality of his plastic expression, as if he were an American brother of Mirò.

In the presentation of Pollock by Frank O'Hara, and of de Kooning by Thomas B. Hess, I am reminded of the whole difficult subject of contemporary art criticism which I discussed in *Arts* (March, May, 1960). Anyone who is not familiar with Pollock's work is not likely to be aided by Mr. O'Hara's remarks; anyone who is familiar with the work and unsympathetic to it will not find his sympathies enlarged; anyone who is sympathetic and familiar with the work is likely to be bored, irritated, or untouched by the overheated restatement of the obvious, and by the repetition of "marvelous," "lyric," "luxurious," "one of the most perfect works of his life or anyone else's," "wonderful," "one of the most provocative images of our time," "one of the great masterpieces of Western art," "a work which contemporary esthetic conjecture had cried out for," "effulgence of sensory indulgence," "abyss of glamor encroached upon by a flood of innocence," and so forth. Such discussion is almost useless; and, especially when reinforced by strained "symbolic" analysis, it ignores most of the interesting questions about Pollock as a painter. I can't imagine what reader was envisaged for these remarks, and thus will recommend only the plates, but with this proviso: the majority of Pollock's pictures are very big, such as 78 by 57½" and 83 by 192½" and 106 by 209⅜", and they all appear on pages which are 7¼ by 10". To "read" these plates requires a visual literacy which must do a lot of work with very sparse clues, because the size and substance of Pollock's paintings is a major part of their subject. Such a literacy is not well developed among us, perhaps can never be, because color or black and white reproductions are not symbolic in the way printed words are. They are much more like

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clumsy approximations of the real thing, too unwieldy to be signs or symbols, and yet too diminished in size and actuality.

The same caution about "reading" the plates applies to de Kooning's work which is also large. These plates were intelligently selected and include many early works which are very instructive in relation to the more familiar ones of the last five years. Readers can see clues to the development of the idea of woman as landscape and landscape as woman which has been one of de Kooning's important visual themes. Mr. Hess's text attempts a sophisticated iconography of this painter's forms, and pays particular attention to the structural compositional ambiguity which has been so great an achievement for de Kooning and so powerful an influence on other painters. Mr. Hess is jazzy, ambitious, sarcastic, exuberant, partisan, hit-and-run, hit-or-miss, and in about ten thousands words aims at the following subjects: the history of modern art in America, the condition of the artist in America, art during the Depression, de Kooning during the Depression, de Kooning's motifs and themes, de Kooning's influence and influences, composition, friends, conversation, ways of working, relation to art history; also French views of American abstract painting, action painting, means and ends in art, and many others. With so many targets the effect is diffuse. It is impossible to say what might be Mr. Hess's view of de Kooning as a painter; one has no sense of a critic responding to an artist—there is only a manic identification. The plates, however, deserve the strongest recommendation, especially because they include drawings and pictures now destroyed or whose whereabouts are unknown.

Homer, Eakins, and Ryder were our great early painters, but it is with Davis, Pollock, and de Kooning that Americans have been painting for the world, for culture altogether. And it is of great significance that their painting should be abstract. The American tradition may well be not the realist one that our national self-image sometimes seems to demand but, rather, an abstract one, so there may be many subtle reasons why American painting now speaks profoundly to the world. One of the questions which arises when this possibility is considered is whether abstraction means a dehumanized art. In 1925, Ortega noted the expulsion of human elements and human dimensions from the "new art," and spoke of its "dehumanization" in a distinctly pejorative sense. Perhaps at that time abstraction was viewed as more privative than it actually was or is. Abstraction in art has never really depended for its force on that denial of actualities which is so characteristic of many of the abstractions of modern life, if only because art always involves the tangible, the specific, the sensuous, the immediacy of medium. Furthermore, artists themselves work abstractly out of a felt practical necessity, in response to the demands and appeals of their craft. When Stuart Davis saw the Armory Show in 1913, he was already acquainted with the modern *spirit;* what overwhelmed him in

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that historic exhibition was the Fauve use of color and a kind of order he found lacking in his own work. The abstract expressionism which is Pollock's and de Kooning's great achievement developed in response to specific problems in art itself: for instance, the exhaustion of cubism, the suggestions and clues offered by surrealism, new feelings about the picture and its composition, and so on. The possibilities in such a development are far less programmatic or ideological than they are pragmatic and tangible, that is, a matter of forms and actualities. Such an art is not "purist," if by purism is meant an art which attempts to discard substance, sensuousness, and actuality. Indeed, very little abstract art is purist in that sense. In contrast to the abstractions of modern life with which we are all familiar, the abstraction in painting is most striking in its capacity to preserve, recover, and renew actuality rather than deny it, to discover the life in forms and evoke response to them. The abandoning of local color, for example, meant not the impoverishment of color in painting, but, instead, the inspired and brilliant art of the Fauves and expressionists.

It is therefore not at all clear that an art which specifically represents or has reference to an explicit human reality is necessarily a more "human" or humane or humanistic art than one which does not. Landscape and still-life are not, in the pejorative sense, "dehumanized," nor are buildings and monuments. They have no specific reference to human reality, but of course they imply it, because they are created by human imagination and gifts, and they are the response of human beings to their life and culture. Furthermore, the human culture is itself based on abstraction—language—and is inconceivable without other exercise of the human faculty for abstraction, which enters life at the moment we ourselves enter it. Indeed, we might say that it is the *failure* to abstract which dehumanizes, and that abstraction is necessary to human life—not so that we may understand Heisenberg, but to understand Mother Goose, not to paint an abstract picture or write about essence and existence, but to write a letter, plant a garden, cook a meal. Perhaps the question is whether art is seen as a world of appearances, imitations, facsimiles, concentrations, or, alternatively, as a world of acts and responses; whether as a mirror or a voice, or both, and in what degrees. Forms speak to us by offering something we want or need, by evoking response, by engaging us in dialogue. They may do this by means of the human image, but that is only one aspect of their magic, not its secret. For Homer, Eakins, and Ryder, the realist human image they inherited was not adequate to the visual world they had to see and evoke, and each of them abandoned it to some degree, Homer by becoming epic, Ryder in being a visionary, and Eakins by rationalizing it. Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of the art represented by Davis, Pollock, and de Kooning is that its renunciation of the realist image does not result in a visually impoverished art. According to all definitions this should not be true.

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NORMAN N. HOLLAND

The Follies Fellini

THREE-HOUR, THREE-MILLION GROSS, triple-goddessed, Church-banned, myth-packed, and Totalscoped, *La Dolce Vita*[1] amazes indeed the very faculty of eyes and ears. Eyes and ears are not just the targets, though, but recurring symbols for what author-director Fellini has on his mind. His protagonist, Marcello, is a reporter and would-be novelist, a man questing (admittedly, rather ineffectively) after truth in the form of sounds and language. Indeed, at one point, Marcello rather shamefacedly mumbles something of the sort. As against this basic stance for sound and language, Fellini shows his people preoccupied with seeing, most obviously in the form of the ubiquitous *papparazzi*, the photographers who contrast with the verbal reporter Marcello—they swarm about virtually everyone and everything as though Sartre's flies had been outfitted with flash cameras. Images of seeing and being seen run all through the film, as, for example, the sunglasses everybody wears (if *It Happened One Night* ruined the men's undershirt industry, surely *La Dolce Vita* will turn prescription sunglasses into a major consumer item). Sights in *La Dolce Vita* are mostly Ziegfeldian sights of women, culminating in Nadia Gray's striptease in the final party, but represented earlier, for example, by the pictures of female ancestors in the "haunted castle" sequence, the sight of the magnificently pneumatic Anita Ekberg, or the non-miraculous non-sight of the Virgin Mary in the televised "fake miracle."

Against these images of seeing and being seen, Fellini poises fewer, but far more striking images of hearing. At the home of Steiner, Marcello's intellectual friend, we hear folk songs and poetry and a tape recording of the sounds of nature; conversation reigns supreme. Steiner himself had earlier gone into a church to practise the Toccata and Fugue in D Minor—after the rock 'n roll and other raucous cacophonies, you can almost feel the Bach soothe your ear. At one point, Marcello retires to the seashore to renew his work on the Great Italian Novel; he cannot write for the loudness of the song from a jukebox played by a virginal young blonde waitress he calls an "Umbrian angel." The song is "Patricia," which Fellini presses into service later

[1] Scenario by Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, and Brunello Rondi. Directed by Signor Fellini; produced by Giuseppe Amato; released in this country by Astor Films. Marcello Rubini is finely played by Marcello Mastroianni, and his photographer-sidekick by Walter Santesso. In addition to the actors identified in the text, the men are: Steiner—Alain Cuny; Marcello's father—Annibale Ninchi. The women are: Emma—Yvonne Furneaux; Maddalena—Anouk Aimee; the nightclub chorine—Magali Noel. The homosexuals I have been unable to identify from cast-lists.

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as the music for the striptease; like the Bach, it, too, is played on an organ. The music of the film parodies itself, and the point of Fellini's images of sound seems to be that they fail. It was, of all people, Robinson Crusoe (though he was surely not the first) who pointed out that sound and language are the means by which human beings can achieve more than an animal relation with each other. Sound and language in *La Dolce Vita,* however, seem always to fail to create such a relationship. In the "haunted castle" sequence, Maddalena, one of Marcello's light o' loves, seats him in a room and goes outside to talk to him through a speaking-tube arrangement (a kind of "ear of Dionysius"). In the only serious moment of their relationship, we *hear* her propose marriage to him; we *see* her giving herself to another man.

The opening and closing bits (they are scarcely episodes) frame this recurring contrast of sight and sound. The opening (already, in the two fast years since the film was released, a classic among openings) shows a gilt image of Christ helicopter-borne over the Eternal City, which Fellini renders as a vast flux of running children and rising buildings; a second helicopter follows, carrying reporter Marcello and his photographer sidekick, apparently fishing for a story. Beneath them, they see a far more gripping sight than the Second, airborne Coming: four girls in bikinis sunbathing on a roof. As the helicopter hovers overhead, Marcello tries to speak to them, but they cannot hear one another over the noise of the chopper. The pattern is: the sight of a symbol; the sight of woman; the failure of sound. In the final shots, Marcello and assorted sodomites, usurers, grifters, and fornicators from the striptease party drift down to the sea (in shots reminiscent of Botticelli). At the sea's edge, some fishermen pull up a huge devilfish, and the camera closes in on its still-staring eye. As Marcello turns to go, the "Umbrian angel" appears on the shore nearby, but there is water between them, and though he sees her and she him, they cannot hear each other for the sound of the waves. He shrugs indifferently and leaves; she turns to watch him go. In a brilliant cinematic touch, Fellini pans the camera as she turns so that the final shot is an extreme close-up of the Umbrian angel staring out at the audience—or us staring at her: the audience has become image, and the image is the audience.

The rough beast from the sea, with its overtones of the birth of some mute and nameless horror from the depths of the unconscious, has provoked a good deal of speculation. Surely the most ingenious suggestion is *Sight and Sound*'s, that it represents Wilma Montesi. *Time,* following its current mythy bent, argues for the beast of the Apocalypse rising up out of the sea, the devilfish as antichrist; the opening bit is the Second Coming, and the film as a whole becomes an allegory of the seven nights of destruction in Revelation (the interpretation would be stronger if the film did not cover eight nights). Others have suggested an allegory on the *Inferno* with Marcello as Dante, his down-

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ward spiral through the sins of contemporary Rome culminating in the ninth circle with the devilfish as Lucifer, complete with three jellyfish dangling from his mouth. *La Vita Nuova* or the *canzonieri* might be relevant to a film which so stresses the image of woman.

All are possible—what is not possible is to see *La Dolce Vita* as "in the main a study of sexual manners," as simply "a sensational presentation of certain aspects of life in contemporary Rome." Some critics want to impose on one Italian, Fellini, the *neo-realismo* of other Italians. Behind this kind of mis-seeing lies a nationalistic view of the film as simply the expression of a particular time and place; also a notion of the film like that of Siegfried Kracauer, the film as nonart, as "the redemption of the real," a view which values in a film only its formal realism. Fellini let himself in for this kind of mis-seeing by basing the public episodes of *La Dolce Vita* on items reported in the Italian press. He is, of course, formally realistic, but that is not the important fact, any more than the trappings of realism (non-professional actors, for example) pasted on the sentimental plots of *Bicycle Thief* or *Umberto D.* prevent those films from being as saccharine as O. Henry. In the album somebody has suggested, "Sviatoslav Richter Plays Stephen Foster," Stephen Foster is still Stephen Foster. De Sica is still a sentimentalist, and Fellini still a mythmaker.

La Dolce Vita seems more tied to reality than Fellini's earlier work, but only "seems." It really has that same strange hankering after myth as his other films. His script for *The Miracle* reached essentially toward the traditional mating in the fields of sun-god and mortal woman. *The White Sheik* with its horseplay on different kinds of hats balanced the impotent male of church and marriage against the absurdly sexual male of the *fumetti* (visual images again). *I Vitelloni* constitutes a parody of the whole male pantheon, while, in *Le notti di Cabiria,* a tawdry and pathetic image of Venus renews herself in water after venal Adonises have chosen and abused her. *La Strada* is the clearest of them all, a classic agon between *eiron* and *alazon* over a (more or less) mute woman that could have come straight out of Cornford's *Origins of Attic Comedy*. *La Dolce Vita* has the same theme and mythic dimension as the others, men overpowered physically, morally, or psychologically by the gorgon-like image of woman. As Steiner says, "I am only this tall," and he holds up his finger. In the "fake miracle" (an earlier form of which appeared in *Cabiria*), an old woman gives us the tip-off. As the television cameras and photographers close in on the two children who have been gulled into saying they saw the Virgin, the crone says, "What does it matter whether it was the Virgin or not? Italy is full of strange cults." And indeed Fellini's Italy is.

The first one we see, the first full episode in the film, is a kind of temple prostitution. The gilt Christ of the opening shots dissolves into the mute sinuosities of a gilt Siamese dancer in a night club where Marcello picks up a rich nymphomaniac, Maddalena (and the name,

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I take it, is not without significance). They ride off in her white Caddy convertible, boredly pick up a prostitute, and drive her home. Fellini goes out of his way to make them go out of theirs, go underground to the prostitute's basement apartment, cross the waters of her flooded basement, and there, in this doubtful chthonic sanctum, make love.

The second is the advent through the air from another land of an Aphrodite Pandemos, Anita Ekberg, cast as a Hollywood love-goddess, Sylvia (again, the name is not without significance). Ritually, she is offered the fruits of the Roman fields (in the form of a giant pizza); then, in an hilarious press conference, she is consulted as an oracle. During the day, she bounds up the endless stairs to the top of St. Peter's, dressed in a parody of a priest's gown. The true aphroditic rituals, however, took place on the tops of mountains or in caves, and that night, bobbling out of her evening grown, Sylvia leads a revel through the Baths of Caracalla, complete with rock 'n roll Orpheus and a faun in the form of a goatish American actor on whose shoulders she rides. "Why, Federico," Miss Ekberg is said to have remarked during the filming of these sequences, "you are making a fool of me." Despite this insight, Miss Ekberg can take comfort in the fact that Fellini was also making her a goddess. In some rituals, her celestial prototype did indeed ride a goat, and Marcello tells her she is mother, mistress, wife, home, "everything." They ride off in his Triumph, where he makes the old college try, but cannot find a place to go. (Throughout the film, blondes are unattainable—or at least unattainable by Marcello—unlike the brunettes, for example, Maddalena.) Our pandemotic love-goddess, however, seems (again, like Aphrodite) concerned as much with mothering animals as with mothering Marcello; anyway, she howls like a dog on a mountaintop, and in an exquisite sequence picks up a stray white kitten and, holding it before her like a monstrance, glides through the narrow corridors of midnight streets. She strides into the Trevi fountain; Marcello follows: "You're right—I'm on the wrong track—we all are." She puts water on his hair in a mock baptism, and to cap the parody, just then the fountain is turned off. They return to her hotel, where her opposite number, Lex Barker as a dipsoid American actor, awaits them, another mythic figure: "To think he once played Tarzan," sighs a *papparazzo*.

There are other "goddesses"—the missing Virgin Mary in the fake miracle; at Steiner's house, an old artist cries the praises of Oriental women, notably Mother Eve. In the haunted castle sequence, Maddalena standing before a row of matrilinear portraits puts a veil over her face; Marcello seduces a mysterious otherworldly "Lady Jane" with streaks in her hair like antennae: the ghosts, nighttime, the cemetery, the surrounding plutocracy give the whole episode a persephonic aura. Finally, of course there is the "Umbrian angel," the virgin by the sea, image of a renewal and innocence, a kind of Aphrodite Urania, whom Marcello cannot accept.

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In this matriarchal world, men become mere consorts, lover-kings, ridiculous, impotent. The clearest case is Marcello's father who turns up just before the necrotic haunted-castle sequence. An aging lecher, he gets his son to take him to an old-fashioned night-club, where the walls glitter like a temple's and everywhere there are statues of women. During the conversation, we find he was usually away from home, rather a philanderer and a wine merchant, indeed, "sold wine all up and down Italy." Playing vanishing parlor-tricks with one of the chorines, he is compared to a donkey. Meanwhile, the acts of the night-club entertainers parody still other aspects of ass-headed Dionysus. The first routine shows a triad of mock-ferocious cat-women ridiculing their quite ineffectual male tamer; the second shows us girls in a Charleston routine out of the father's youth; finally, in an exquisite act, the clown Polidor appears as a doddering Pied Piper, awed by the images of woman about him. A few pathetic notes of his almost limp trumpet and he shuffles out, trailing clouds of—empty balloons. Marcello's father goes to the chorus girl's apartment ("to eat spaghetti"), but suffers a stroke of some kind as they are making love. Pathetic, aging, his face always turned away, he wants only to return to Marcello's mother. In one of the most beautiful moments in the film, sick and exhausted as he is, he stoops and silently smoothes out the bed, removing his last trace; it is as though he had never been. So much for fatherhood.

Throughout the film, from the vulgarized Christ at the opening to the transvestite dance of the homosexuals at the end, man seems weak and helpless. Throughout, women lead men—Maddalena leads Marcello to the prostitute's apartment; Sylvia bounds up the steps of St. Peter's leaving behind clusters of exhausted Romans, and the haunted-castle sequence ends with the old *principessa*-matriarch leading the shamefaced "men" of the tribe off to Mass. Throughout, men seem awed, overcome by women, often trying to make themselves into women, sinking down into women. The men seem unable to get places; they have to clamber, grope, fly, break into places women seem to sink into effortlessly. When men do achieve heights, "rise above it all," they flag and gasp, revealing their impotency—Marcello climbing St. Peter's; Marcello's father up in the chorine's apartment; the cameramen's lights on high platforms shattering and popping in the fake miracle; the insignificance of the helicoptered Christ; the insignificance of our modern Mars—Marcello Rubini.

The exception (for a time, anyway) to all this is Steiner, Marcello's intellectual friend whose short unhappy life forms the most puzzling episode of the film. Unlike the other characters whose lives are dominated by sights and shows, Steiner lives in a world of sound and language. When we first see him, he is returning a Sanskrit text. He offers Marcello jobs in publishing, encourages him in his writing. Steiner, moreover, is a father with a lovely wife and charming children. Home-

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spun, sturdy (Fellini originally wanted Henry Fonda for the part), he alone seems master of his fate. In fact, the whole situation is so goody-goody, it cloys. Then, inexplicably, Steiner commits suicide, destroying not only himself, but his children, destroying, in effect, his own fatherhood, his limited claim to be part of the flow of life, a total suicide. The film gives no particular reason for Steiner's suicide. It seems just one more in the long series of improvisations that make up *La Dolce Vita.* Impulse and improvisation are the ways the other characters work, however—not Steiner. In the first scene in which he appears, he starts to improvise jazz on the church organ, but at a gentle rebuke from the priest obediently shifts to the Toccata and Fugue, a frozen, "perfected" improvisation, as it were. At his house, he says, "In a work of art, everything is planned and perfect. We need to be a work of art, detached, perfect, in suspended animation," and yet, he also said his own life was too much so (the goody-goody quality of everything associated with Steiner). There seems to be no room in his life for the new, the unexpected. His suicide is the only improvisation left him and, at the same time, the closing or framing of his perfected life. It leaves his wife to be photographed by the *papparazzi,* she, now, image of the *mater dolorosa.* Quite the opposite is the only other sustained human relationship Marcello has in the course of the film, that with his mistress, Emma. Squabbles, flirtations, attempted suicides, reconciliations, their relation is one long series of improvisatons as she tries to "catch" him, fix him into matrimony and fatherhood, a Fury valiantly striving to be a hearth-goddess.

The film, then, uses its two central images, sight and sound, to set off men against women. The women are goddesses, mythical, unreal *belles dames sans merci,* the sight of whom bewitches men into a kingdom of improvisation and illusion. Man is impotent, helpless, Marcello's dying father or Steiner, with his sounds and language, frozen, turned into stone by the fixity of his life. (Indeed, sacred to Cybele was a small meteoric stone *acus,* supposed to have fallen from the heavens.) Marcello, Everyman, is caught between these two alternatives, male and female, his mistress vainly seeking to play the role of goddess and petrify him into matrimony.

These themes all come together in the final dreary episode, the despairingly hedonistic party that follows Marcello's appearance at the scene of Steiner's suicide. The subjugation of men culminates in the dance of the homosexuals and gigolos, and the image of woman culminates in the striptease (to the same song the Umbrian angel had played on the jukebox). Marcello presides over the dispirited merrymaking (the only case where a man is the "leader"), and as the party whimpers to its close he baptizes the departing revellers with feathers, as though he himself were plucking the chickens of Mother Carey (*mater cara*), a grim parody of the earlier, Ekbergian baptism, just as his white suit is now the negative of the tuxedo he wore in the earlier episode. The

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effect is rather like snow, perhaps the snow of the ninth circle, perhaps also that "snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead." This, the last party, gives way to the film's final image of man, a devil-fish gasping in air, an eye caught in a net, and the final image of woman, the Umbrian-Uranian angel.

As with any important work, *La Dolce Vita* defines its own art. Fellini's concern about turning people into images finds its expression in what might be called the rotogravure style of the film. Fellini had both sets and costumes of *La Dolce Vita* designed to photograph in exaggerated blacks and whites, so that everything in the film would have the hard, contrasty look of a flash photo. The film itself seems almost to be composed as a series of stills rather than as a moving picture. Fellini's sense of the new, the unexpected, his theme of improvisation, finds its expression in the episodic structure (here, as in *Vitelloni,* this episodic quality seems a weakness of the film; only in *La Strada,* it seems to me, did Fellini overcome this his besetting vice). Fellini's brilliant use of dissolves also suggests a kind of impulse or improvisation (the best example being the opening dissolve where the gilt image of Christ suddenly, startlingly becomes a gilt Siamese dancer). This sense of improvisation, by the way, is not inappropriate for perhaps the only major director in the world who likes working on a chaotic set, who insists a script can only be an outline and "writes" his pictures by improvising on the set.

As in his earlier films, Fellini is essentially getting at a view of man as helpless and abject before the gorgon-like, all-powerful image of woman (in *Vitelloni,* for example, the gallant in the religious-goods shop surrounded by images of the Virgin, or—the most magnificent shot in that film—the half-wit worshipping a statue of an angel by the sea). Here, again, the theme fits a director who will look through thousands of photographs to get an actor with the right image; indeed, he claims to have interviewed 10,000 actors for *La Dolce Vita,* truly a cinematic Ziegfeld. The good, grey *Times* insists on a Fellini "taking the temperature of a sick world," and that is no doubt true, but it is also a Fellini preoccupied with dehumanizing people, making them into things (*Cabiria*) or heroes (*La Strada*) or gods (*The White Sheik*), but in every case, dehumanizing them, making them into images—not an unnatural preoccupation for a man whose work in life is to turn people into celluloid.

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JOSEPH BENNETT

The Essences of Being

THIS FILM[1] IS ABOUT THE IMPOSSIBILITY of communication between human beings. At its intensest moment, Monica Vitti turns to Gabriele Ferzetti, her handsome, good-natured, weak-willed lover, and finds that he, after consummating his desire, is lost in meditation. The beauty of the great honey-colored baroque squares of Noto outside their hotel balcony has accused him with the failure of his youthful dreams as an architect, for he has fallen into a squalid success in commercial contracting. Her ecstasy, rhythmed by the blare of a popular song in the square below, is stopped by his detachment. He is gnawing his defeat.

He goes out to the Cathedral square and is confronted by his failure, in the form of an ink sketch being made of a superb shell-concave niche. He spills the ink, to scourge himself, and ruins the work of the artist. He tells us that he too, at twenty-three, had fought many fist-fights; a solemn queue of black-robed ecclesiastical students marshaled by their priestly instructors, emerging from the huge Chiesa Madre, tells him that life goes on; that at forty, defeated, he is of the process.

He returns abruptly. He is accused anew by the facade of the Immacolata Church, visible from their balcony, sought and sharply held by the marvelously intuitive camera. He slams the shutters, seizes her, in the manner of rape. She does not know him. Then it will be a new adventure, he tells her as she weeps. They break apart, leave the hotel. Surely one of the great sequences in cinema.

There is a nominal narrative thread, vaguely stringing together the episodes. Gabriele Ferzetti has not been able to strike through to communication with his self-abstracted fiancee, played by Lea Massari. She prefers absence, a month, a year; she prefers separation to being together; resists their meetings. They cruise, with her friend, played by Monica Vitti, to the Liparian islands. There are also with them two couples, connected with his business.

On the harshly beautiful rock of Liscabianca, they still fail of communication. His fiancee disappears. He, her friend, the couples, search the rock; the police, a helicopter, a hydrofoil arrive. To no avail. He and her friend continue the search on land.

At the florid *municipio* of Bagheria, the Villa Gravina Palagonia transformed by Antonioni to a Customs Station at Milazzo, the friend,

[1] *L'AVVENTURA*. Direction and screenplay by Michelangelo Antonioni. Dialogue by Michelangelo Antonioni, Elio Bartolini and Tonino Guerra. Photography by Aldo Scavarda. Art direction by Piero Polletto. Music by Giovanni Fusco. Produced by Cino Del Duca. With Monica Vitti, Gabriele Ferzetti, Lea Massari, Dominique Blanchar and Esmeralda Ruspoli.

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Monica Vitti, leaves him to return to Monreale. They are in love. He pursues her. On the train[2] a charming folklore interchange between rural Sicilian boy and girl underlines the theme of impossibility of communication; at the villa of Princess Lampedusa near Monreale the couples from the cruise are as far apart as ever. One woman (perfectly rendered by Esmeralda Ruspoli) has exchanged her lover for her husband, with equal ennui.

The gaiety and vivacity shown by Antonioni in the folklore interchange returns again in the publicity-stunt of the *poule de luxe* (again: no communication between the sexes; between human beings); it is shown further in the serenely abstract joyousness of the wig-changing scene between the two women at the villa; in the adolescent amorousness of the Princess' seventeen-year old grandson (again no communication: he is attempting to seduce a married woman twenty years older). By a newspaper ruse Gabriele Ferzetti tricks Monica Vitti into meeting him at a pharmacist's shop "at Troina." This scene (shot on the plain, not at Troina) is again richly folkloristic; the pharmacist and his wife underline the impossibility of communication anywhere.

The lovers go on alone. The search for the lost girl has become the excuse for their amour. They pass through one of the new Cassa del Mezzogiorno towns near Caltanisetta; the cinema "desertion" of the new village underlines the soul-isolation of modern life. A hazy view of Etna from the immense distance of the Augusta plain, smoky, abstract, incredibly distant, rendered with miraculous camera vision, provides the locale for their union. The train sweeps past, close to them.

Finally they arrive at the great *plateresque* architectural ensemble of Noto. This triumph of the late Spanish-Sicilian baroque provides the background for the episode described earlier; furnishing the proper challenge for the architect to recognize his career defeat. Architecture too had been the camera theme in the Customs Station at the Villa Palagonia. But now it provides the offset to love, and there is no communication.

Nearly two hours have gone by before these moments arrive. Quickly the scene changes from the simple inn at Noto to the San Domenico Palace hotel at Taormina. They arrive by no route at all that leads from Noto to Taormina, but rather Antonioni shoots their automobile passing out of one of the rock-hewn galleries near the north coast. In their room in the luxurious San Domenico, Ferzetti is about to go down to dinner with the contractor. The woman remains in bed. She speaks first:

"Tell me that you love me."
"I love you."
"Tell it to me again."

[2] The train pulls in to the station at Castroreale. When Ferzetti gets out, and the train pulls off, the locale has changed to a station near the great rock of Cefalù, so that the camera can take in its grandiloquent desolation.

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"I don't love you."
"I deserved that."

She means that she deserves his reproach for asking him to repeat that he loves her. He closes the door, reopens it:

"It isn't true. I love you." (He leaves.)

There is an exquisitely delicate fluctuation here between poignancy and barrenness; the threat of isolation is implied. In this scene and the one cited at Noto Antonioni has projected shapes and emotions out of his own mind directly into ours, in faithful variability and intangibleness. The medium has been cinematic; the veil has broken; two minds have come to contact, that of the audience and that of the director, without a medium, without a stream of flickering light and shadows between the two intelligences.

The demonstration of the theme is then made in a few sharp strokes. She surprises him (the following dawn) in flagrant infidelity on a public couch with the *poule de luxe* of the earlier comic sequence. He is weak. Handsome, good-natured, accommodating; not the master of himself. She discovers her own fidelity to his weakness in a reconciliation scene that emphasizes the absolute, the unchanging: the bombed-out tower of the San Domenico church; the snow-mantled Etna; the shrill urgency of the train-whistles coming up from Giardini seven hundred feet below. The sound-track has exaggerated the three crescendoing train-whistles; and it has greatly amplified the rolling of the waves, to bring into the conclusion all the work done by the film on the Liparian island of Liscabianca. The same dry and clean, abstract flute solo (the Liparian theme) comes into the soundtrack, with the sea-waves, to complete the film. Isolation. Reconciliation. Separation. Recurrent waves of the cycle.

What has gone on in the preceding two hours? It seems to me that this film is the first important step forward since Fellini's extraordinary *I Vitelloni* (1953). But in this film Antonioni exhibits an incomparably greater range, depth and subtlety. Starting with *Il Bidone* (1955), much more so in *Cabiria* and exhaustingly and disappointingly so in his current and by far poorest film, *La Dolce Vita,* Fellini has become the moralist, the Puritan, the maker of parables and allegory. But Antonioni has seized after the thing which Fellini did in *I Vitelloni,* and carried it further, with greater delicacy, greater syncopation, and less charm. The form demands great length.

This film is *about* the impossibility of communication between human beings, but it is much more than that: it is the creation of a reality, a world which can be entered, therapeutic and more relaxing than the one in which we live, and yet more interesting, more unconventional, more vital. It shares with *I Vitelloni* the ability to create a world, alternate to our own world, and more inviting; it offers us a

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vision of reality, at least as authentic as our own, and invites us to live within it. Both films, if successfully seen, have this therapeutic, relaxing quality. A discharge of the present, a liberation into a world of greater clarity and range, greater breadth and more subtle texture, and finally, greater innocence, despite the sophistication of (at least) Antonioni's worldlings.

In essence what I am saying is that what Antonioni is creating is not a film, not a theme, but a world, a vision of reality which is gentle and embracing and seductive and extraordinarily satisfying, despite some surface harshnesses in plot progressions. The test of the effect is whether, after the two hours and twenty odd minutes of the film, you are tempted *not* to go back to the street; but to stay there with the film, not to find out what is happening, or what is being done, but simply because you do not want to leave a world deeper in texture, in form, and alternate to your own.

This was, I think, in essence the undefinable charm of Fellini's *I Vitelloni,* its fantastic depth and durability. It was *about* adolescents adjusting to the progress of time, their resistance to maturity, just as this film is *about* something. But really, was *I Vitelloni about* anything? I think not; I think it was an earlier version of a strikingly similar reality of which Antonioni's film is the full, and full-length, development. People are looking at landscapes: Fellini's old actor gazes at the sea at night; his young men gaze at the sea from the pier. What are they gazing at? Is Antonioni's architect *really* gazing at the square and his lost genius, when his attention drifts far from his love?

Fellini did not continue with *I Vitelloni,* and turned away to more tangible themes, essentially to parable. Perhaps both it and Antonioni's film represent a cinema ultimate—pure contemplation, the spiritual life, aesthetic monasticism. Certainly there is purity in both films such as Mallarmé aimed at; they too are working toward the blank page. There is just enough left to catch a visible world, a tangible reality.

Whether or not we like the *poésie pure,* I think we can make the point that here we have the *cinéma pur.* Fellini stopped, some would say had the good sense to stop, and turned to more simple and more justifiable work. He is now busily engaged in giving us a *Pilgrim's Progress.* Perhaps beyond *L'Avventura* lies the *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* or the *Finnegans Wake* that Fellini had the good sense to turn away from, knowing they would be failures. The inescapable failure of the absolute, the attack on the absolute.

Soundtrack. Music. The richest, most devious soundtrack, the subtlest musical score since *I Vitelloni.* The lack of music—not the haunting, torturing emotionality of the *Vitelloni* score, but the waiting, waiting for the superb dry abstract jazz of the wig-changing scene (one of the many "pure" frivolities, "pure" untouched life-scenes, not adding up, not meaningful in themselves). And again we wait, and wait, in silence, for the arrival at the San Domenico hotel: the mandolins sweep out as

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the door opens but they are not the lax and uninspired mandolins of convention but pure rhythm, working counter to melody; they are the beat of the south, of *south-ness,* abstracted to a philosophic principle. There is silence. More music: the dialect of the people. The smugglers at the Customs-Station: "C'è mi sora ch'è malatt' d'un annu"; the pharmacist; the men-wolves in the square, the landlady, the taxi-driver, all at Noto: "No saccio. No saccio. Francesa? Furastiera?" The Liparian shepherd: "Che fu? Che fu?"

And then there is all the variability, the silkiness, the vague *sfumato* quality of Scavarda's camera-work under Antonioni's direction. A camera dry and yet romantic, obsessed with architecture, both natural, rocks, cliffs, seas, shores, islands; and man-made. Long shots from the villa near Monreale to the distant heights of Sferracavallo and Monte Gallo, mist-shrouded, as the comedy of the pubescent painter's seduction of a giddy married woman is played out.

There is much comedy, much variability, and no justification in this film. This film *exists* because it *is.* It does not think. It does not plan ahead. There is no drive, no line. Every movement is a succession of asides. Antonioni is dealing with essences here, with what is pragmatic, with that which succeeds itself. *On, onta.* He is dealing with "being," with "what is."

***Notes on Contributors** (cont.)*

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Reviews

BENJAMIN DE MOTT

Operation Jesus

AT ABOUT THIS SEASON a hundred years ago Pusey and his men were counting clerical signatures (11,000 of them) on a petition that damned Darwinism and the higher criticism and laid down once more the doctrine of biblical infallibility. Bishop Colenso's *Critical Examination of the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua* was being readied for the press. An ecclesiastical court had just condemned Jowett, Temple and five others for speaking well of advances in biblical scholarship and natural science. The rumble between Huxley and Wilberforce at the Oxford meeting of the British Association was still news. Everywhere, in the bookstalls, in all the theaters of the elite, the idea of the embattled Christian and the embattled atheist or freethinker or Broad Churcher was fully and compellingly alive.

The situation now is a shade different, as everyone knows. Young theologians and old skeptics still put their notions forth in books and tracts; existential theology sells well and stimulates a measure of controversy; problems in the meaning of history continue to figure in poetry. But all sense of urgent public conflict over religious issues has vanished. In 1961 the young theologian's book is called *The Death of God* and the old skeptic's, *The Future of Unbelief*—and the argument of both items seems the same. The critic of Niebuhr, Buber, Tillich, Barth and Bultmann "speaks out"—and his manner is altogether cool and controlled. (He says, to quote from a recent complaint of the President of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, that although the theologians mentioned are "perceptive and poetic," they are also "clever and cute" and "do not succeed in providing a lasting satisfaction.") As for the literary imagination: it is bemused by an elegant guitar, the voice of a poet who yawns at truth and asks only for a more precise assessment of the value of human fancy:

> What should we be without the sexual myth,
> The human reverie or poem of death?
> Castratos of moon-mash—Life consists
> Of propositions about life.

Why then—to leap from the potting shed to a question—why then

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did the book at hand cause such a throwing-about of brains when it appeared last spring?[1]

The fact of the brain-throwing needs little documentation. Here and in England book pages and correspondence columns were filled with believers (and others) viewing with alarm. Old friends snapped at each other in the *TLS* (". . . what I wanted to know," Eliot wrote testily to Dr. Rattray, his Harvard classmate, is "whether the learned committee believe that St. Luke believed in the Virgin Birth?"). For an instant the forces of Kingsley Martin and Barry Goldwater made common cause in a metaphor (in March the *New Statesman* muttered about the dilution of "the full-bodied wine of the King James' version;" in May the *National Review* ran its Bible piece under the title "Water in the Wine"). Everyone from the middle articler of the *TLS* to Stanley Edgar Hyman of *The New Leader* came on with astonishing force for "mystery," "majesty," and "obscurity." And hosts of self-declared non-believers joined V. S. Pritchett in regretfully doubting that the new translation would direct men to "the roots of [their] lost faith."

At first glance it would appear that this concern for lost faith stemmed from the old literary enthusiasm for Jacobean sonority, rather than from awakened responsiveness to Christian tradition. Objections to the *NEB* centered on its language, which was variously described as savorless, flat, and difficult to memorize. And although the objections were sometimes hysterically expressed (the *National Review* was in a flap about the silencing of "a pulse that set the tempo for all later trumpet-marshalling of words"), they did have substance. The literary panels of the Joint Committee on the new Bible had in fact turned the professors' texts into quick-little-English-novelese. Gergasene pigs and Mary of Magdala (which replace Gadarene swine and Mary Magdalene) don't often appear, to be sure, in current fiction. But a thousand other phrases of the new New Testament do turn up in such books, among them: "take life easy" (Luke 12:19), "heatwave" (Luke 12:55), "big dinner party" (Luke 14:16), "began to feel the pinch" (Luke 15:15), "on a charge of subversion" (Luke 23:14), "hope to be in the public eye" (John 7:4), "it was kind of you to come" (Acts 10:33), "liberal-minded" (Acts 17:11), "the latest novelty" (Acts 17:21), "high standard of living" (Acts 19:25), "a perfect pest" (Acts 24:5), "no hole-and-corner business" (Acts 26:26), "work as a team" (I Corinthians 3:8), "flying

[1] THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE. NEW TESTAMENT. *C. H. Dodd,* Director. Cambridge and Oxford U. P. 1961. $4.95. "The Joint Committee [of English and Scottish Churches] appointed a panel of scholars, drawn from various British universities . . . The procedure was for one member of the panel . . . to submit a draft translation of a particular book or group of books. This draft was circulated to members of the panel for their consideration . . . Discussion was continued until they reached a common mind. . . . The Committee appointed a panel of literary advisers, to whom all the work of the translating panel has been submitted. They scrutinized it . . . and took pains to secure the tone and level of language appropriate to the different kinds of writing to be found in the New Testament . . ." (Introduction).

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visit" (I Corinthians 16:7)—not to speak of items like "loophole," "environment," "frustration" and the like. And plainly there is a disquieting difference between the tone of these phrases and "authorized" Bible tone ("What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes?").

Significant as this difference is, however, it was probably not the chief source of disquiet about the new New Testament. The case is, to speak bluntly, that the *NEB* is far less striking in its diction than in its determination to show forth the propagation of the gospel as a meanly human enterprise in mass persuasion. The professors and *litterateurs* who produced the book doubtless did not intend to see with the eye of the eighteenth century—the eye that lingers on the ugly, reductive, political detail, that understands faith as dementia, that relishes the sly manipulative gestures of Spiritual Leaders. They were surely at least as responsive as others to the success of that great intellectual effort (now almost two centuries old and still in process) to justify through science an ironical view of the master ironists—the worshippers of Julian, the sneerers at myth. But the effect of their labor is to raise doubts that the defeated rationalist prejudices owed everything to the inner vulgarity of the rationalists, and nothing to the ugliness of the facts themselves.

The new version of the life of Christ has no role in stimulating these doubts: the story is impossible to demean. The doubts originate instead in the *NEB* translation of the Acts of the Apostles and of the letters of Paul himself. The latter's gifts as an operational intelligence were visible before, as should be said, in many passages of the Authorized Version. The Jacobean translators permitted a glimpse of Paul as a man who hints to all his correspondents that each has his special affection: "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand," he tells the Galatians (6:11). And conceivably the new translation of the passage—"You see these big letters? I am now writing you in my own hand"—will not strike everyone as a more direct appeal to credulity, a more obvious exercise in charismatics. Again, the *AV* rarely implies that Paul is above concern about the possibility that his motives may be misunderstood; it translates II Corinthians (1:23, 24) as follows:

> Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

And some readers may claim that the note of urgent political fence-mending and flattery is no stronger in the *NEB* version of the passage:

> I appeal to God to witness what I am going to say; I stake my life upon it: it was out of consideration for you that I did not after all come to Corinth. Do not think we are dictating the terms of your faith; your hold on the faith is secure enough. We are working with you for your own happiness.

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But elsewhere in the *NEB* political, managerial, and administrative considerations are emphasized in a fashion for which earlier translators provide no precedents. The *AV* shies away from details of fiscal organization, translating I Timothy 5:17 as follows:

> Let the elders that rule be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

The *NEB,* on the other hand, repeatedly develops contexts of job classification and salary incentives:

> Elders who do well as leaders should be reckoned worthy of a double stipend, in particular those who labour at preaching and teaching.[2]

The *AV,* sympathetic to the notion that divinity itself has all problems of provisioning in its charge, prefers not to take up the subject of financial needs. When Paul writes to Corinth that:

> Behold the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not your's, but you . . .

the nature of the burdens that the Corinthians might have been asked to bear remains unspecified. But in the *NEB* the ambiguity disappears:

> Here am I preparing to pay you a third visit; and I am not going to sponge upon you. It is you I want, not your money . . .

When Paul thanks the Phillippians for a gift (in the *AV*), he is overwhelmed by his sense of the meaning of what has been offered, and alludes to his disinterest in the objects themselves only as a way of expressing exhilaration in the symbol that they create:

> Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

The *NEB,* however, not only over-protests and assigns to the temporal receiver God's place as judge of "acceptability," it produces—like an efficient organization with tax-exempt status—a neat receipt:

> Do not think I set my heart upon the gift; all I care for is the profit accruing to you. However, here I give you my receipt for everything —for more than everything; I am paid in full, now that I have received from Epaphroditus what you sent. It is a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Are these trivial matters? The possibility that they are is weakened

[2] It may be mentioned that in none of the passages to be quoted here is the Revised Standard Version (1946, 1952) less discreet than the *AV*. In I Timothy 5: 17, for example, it retains the phrase "double honor," and avoids both "reckoned" and "counted" in favor of "considered."

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by the truth that those administrative and political considerations which figure in the *NEB* snippets just quoted figure even more largely in a number of great Biblical sayings—items that in the past have not been thought of as devices of mass persuasion. Indeed on some occasions Christian prohibitions against the love of money, for example, are defined in the *NEB* as special strategies, ways of beating off the competition, rather than as universal ideals. The seventeenth century translators were not much interested in establishing that the motive of the false preacher is to collect contributions from the credulous—as this version of I Timothy 6:3-6 makes clear:

> If any man teach otherwise . . . he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain.

And because of their relative unconcern about this point, the declaration a few verses later that the love of money is the root of all evil has the force of a general argument, not that of a critique of the competition. The parallel passages of the *NEB,* however, insist on the greediness of the opposition ("They think religion should yield high dividends . . ."), and thereby frame a context in which the remark against love of money is only an attack upon unenlightened preachers.

Other hints that asceticism is a ploy—a tactic, not an ideal—occur frequently in the new translation. In the eleventh chapter of II Corinthians Paul examines possible reasons for the Corinthians' momentary disaffection with him. He suggests ironically that his offense might be that he "made no charge for preaching the gospel of God" (*AV* has: "because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely," which again is ambiguous), and goes on to say that, while he was with these people, "If I ran short I sponged on no one; anything I needed was fully met by our friends . . ." He then declares that this will continue to be his policy, and explains his reason:

> . . . I shall go on doing as I am doing now, to cut the ground from under those who would seize any chance to put their vaunted apostleship on the same level as ours.

In the *AV* the dimension of this decision as strategy is less clear, because the idea of a contest with a prestigious victory as its end is not fully embraced:

> But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.

As goes without saying, there are some grounds for doubting that it

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is the operational substance, the historical specificity, of the *NEB*, not its diction, which first roused the commentators to noisy protest. The notion that a man who complains about the loss of certain rhythms is not also talking about the loss of certain meanings is, after all, less than sound. A writer who regretted the changes in the speech of the centurion to Jesus (*AV*: "Speak the word only;" *NEB*: "You have only to say the word") might well have been expressing disappointment in the modern imagination of gravity, as well as simple disapproval of savorless "big dinner party" talk. And again: the commentators' disinclination to focus on shifts of characterization in the *NEB* doubtless stems in part from the awareness of these men that every age characterizes according to its will. (Although Gibbon would have admired Arnold's Paul, he would not have fully understood him, and both writers would be shocked at Paul as constructed for the present age by E.-J. Cioran.) The poet quoted a moment ago once wrote that:

> . . . in the presence of our reality, the past looks false and is, therefore, dead, and is, therefore, ugly; and we turn away from it as from something repulsive and particularly from the characteristic that it has a way of assuming: something that was noble in its day, grandeur that was, the rhetorical once.

And it is improbable, in light of current approval of Stevens' assumptions, that the commentators wrote as they did because, in their innocence, they believed in the possibility of a "rhetorical now."

When all this is said, however, the likelihood still seems strong that the most serious objections to the new *New Testament* were rooted in the suspicion that the book, in telling more history than needed to be told, smutches the dignity of the "western inheritance." Some will argue of course—thinking perhaps of Kierkegaard, whose attacks on Christendom have more weight for modern men than Gibbon's—that there was little dignity left to preserve. But even people of this disposition will be surprised at the capacity of the *NEB* to shock. To repeat: the men responsible for the book seem almost desperate in their determination to convey the brute realities of an imperiled mass movement. They are always at pains to communicate a sense of the gospel as under endless challenge from men who could be fought by prayer but defeated only by canniness; they cannot resist dramatizing to the reader the nagging, exhausting labor involved in "holding the organization together;" their ultimate purpose seems at moments to be that of *proving* to the unenlightened that western civilization grew up out of a petty scrap between the equivalents of CORE and the NAACP. And this onslaught, regardless of the reader's state of faith, has extraordinary impact.

So much impact, indeed, that in the end it becomes impossible to ask a question or ponder a point: the history is too unremitting. How much does the life of the Christian ideal in the post-Renaissance world

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owe to the simple distaste of Renaissance elites who framed it for economic fact and operational gossip? Does the language of the *NEB* mirror the tawdriness of the past or of the contemporary imagination? Does the act of turning away from the "grandeur that was" prove or disprove in itself that the grandeur was spurious? What is depressing about the new English New Testament is not that it raises such questions but that (from a new infallibility) it pronounces definite answers to them—answers from which, even for the believer, there would seem to be little hope of appeal.

Coming - - in THE HUDSON REVIEW:

FRANK BUTLER: The Watchers in the Dark
PATRICK CRUTTWELL: Romantics and Victorians
DENIS DONOGHUE: Poetry and the Behavior of Speech
HERBERT GOLD: One Sunday Morning at the Russian Bath
ANTHONY HECHT: Shades of Keats and Marvell
IRVING HOWE: T. E. Lawrence: The Problem of Heroism
RICHMOND LATTIMORE: Athens Letter
ROBERT LOWELL: William Carlos Williams
BEN MADDOW: In a Cold Hotel
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS: The Dance

Poems by ROBERT BLY, JOHN HAAG, JOHN HOLLOWAY, MAXINE W. KUMIN, WILLIAM MEREDITH, ANNE SEXTON, LOUIS SIMPSON, WILLIAM STAFFORD, ETC.

Chronicles and Reviews by ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS, BENJAMIN DE MOTT, RICHARD FOSTER, NORTHROP FRYE, B. H. HAGGIN, NORMAN N. HOLLAND, JOHN SIMON, VERNON YOUNG, ETC.

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PAUL GOODMAN

The Pragmatism of His Boyhood

THERE IS A BEAUTIFUL INCLUSIVENESS and concreteness to ecological history, the story of changing human environments. Unlike the older political history written from the point of view of ruling groups, it tells us the motion of mankind; the history of cities does not assume that the common lot has always been the same. Yet unlike the later social and economic history, it can pause at achieved moments and significant embodiments of culture, of constructive will and idea; it is not altogether merged in the process, it discovers values. Yet again, it is more philosophical, less theological, than the history of civilizations, for it finds its structures *in re,* in actual human ways of life; it does not abstract values. It is anthropological history, defining patterns of culture and changing patterns of culture; and when combined with the history of education, the taking on of culture, it is the history of the whole man.

Lewis Mumford is the dean of us who work this field in America. Born in 1895, he breathes the transitional spirit of the 'teens and 20's, the humanistic dissent from the rationalistic and technological progress-ideology of the previous generations, yet prior to the more despairing merely political ferment of the 30's or the desperate resignation of the generation following. His critical and selective approach to science still has the pragmatic optimism of the great reformists of the period of his boyhood, Patrick Geddes, Bernard Shaw, John Dewey, the young Frank Lloyd Wright, etc. In our own decade, of course, this pragmatism—see the problem and reason up a solution—is called "utopian," but that's our problem.

In forty years of working on community plans, Mumford has become a considerably learned man, with the kind of information that is acquired by singling out, in wide reading and travel, what is significant for practical application. Even in compiling a history like the present work,[1] he is really oriented to the immediate future: the questions are, what to conserve, what to try to recapture, what to alter, what to invent? And I am convinced that this is not, finally, an irrelevant way of understanding the past, for it is a regulative principle of history that those people were understandable to us, and it follows that they can be useful to us. The danger in such a procedure—and one that Mumford often succumbs to—is that by taking past peoples too quickly in our terms, we fail to probe ourselves. (I think this history would be more useful if it were less discursive, sometimes jumbling half a dozen

[1] THE CITY IN HISTORY, by *Lewis Mumford.* Harcourt, Brace, & World. $11.50.

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centuries in a single discussion; but if it rather explored "typical" cases with more antiquarian thoroughness. Further, Mumford restricts himself to our western tradition, from Babylon and Egypt through Greece and Rome to western Europe and America; he barely mentions Far Eastern or Amerindian cities, nor even Byzantine and Russian cities. Given his pragmatic disposition, he ought to dwell precisely on exotic ethnologies. For instance, he leaves us with the impression that the resuscitative "neolithic" village-life is everywhere pretty much the same; but indeed, with its various neuroses and psychoses and flashes of brilliant health, it is astoundingly—and instructively—diverse.)

The City in History is a good book. By and large it is sleepy reading. (But there are lively sections, when the author becomes emotionally involved, as with the miseries of Rome.) Mumford is peculiarly humorless; his earnest rhetoric avoids epigram; and his rounded kind of thinking eschews sharp definitions. Yet every page is packed with original reflection, sometimes novel, and sometimes of a high order. He draws on many authors, but the spirit and purpose are his own, and it is appropriate and charming when, in the midst of an ancient description, he lashes out with a contemporary gripe of his own, for instance at the outrageous remodelling of the Pennsylvania Station. For a professional beginner in the subject, a student of architecture or planning, this book must be a remarkable compendium of new ideas; and I myself found many striking notions, e.g. the treatment of Venice as a neighborhood plan; the meaning of the township as an elementary region; the concept of mining as exploitative behavior; the almost accidental misfortune of the scarcely fifty year interval of coal and steam between decentralized water-power and decentralized electricity. The average reader can take the book as a picturesque general history of European civilization, profounder than usual histories.

Except for his amiable bias for the wholeness of life, Mumford is usually fair in his evaluations. In his enthusiasm for their integral planning, he overlooks the cruelty and superstition of medieval towns; and he attacks the forcefully imposed rationalism of the Baroque as if it were not also the age of Spinoza and Galileo; but in such cases he is obviously still righting unbalanced judgments current in his youth. Most often he aims at the center of the target. He starts by setting up a polarity between a palaeolithic predatory "male" drive to power and control—one is reminded of Veblen—and a neolithic generative and symbiotic "female" community life; and, without being pedantic about it, he keeps reminding us that we must bear both these in mind to understand historical cities. This approach is more fruitful than, for instance, the one-sided élite and power analysis of Sjöberg's recent *Pre-Industrial City,* which inevitably leads to an over-emphasis on sociological control and technological solutions that are really the identical power-ideology now called liberalism and democracy. Mumford has the radical conservatism of a community anarchist, a follower of

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Kropotkin; he will not give up sun and air and the face-to-face village; he insists that man never has given them up; and nevertheless, cities have attained, and can attain, the advantages of the "magnet" of high culture and the "container" of centralized information. Or let me make the same point by another contrast: whereas Buckminster Fuller wants the progressive etherealization of the city, Mumford insists on both etherealization and materiality; the city must be a "place where meetings and encounters and challenges reduce again to human dimension the vast impersonal network." The good city must permit again the dramatic clash of Athens.

The modern city can make human sense; it is a question of inventing the right arrangements. In his last chapter Mumford develops a fine analogy between the electric power grid and the national library system that allows every locality to draw on any book as needed; and this analogy can be extended to every kind of planning. One may or may not agree (I do not) with Mumford's infatuation with Ebenezer Howard's Garden City planning, but certain principles are fundamental, namely, that there must be a mean size, a limitation in terms of specific functions, and that there must be a system of federation. The differences among plans, in size and layout, will depend on what specific functions are considered to be salient. (To my mind, Howard and Mumford are unpolitical; they are too ready to let the control of modern technology fall to central planning experts and administrators. The Garden City population of 30,000 with its "variety of enterprises, mixed population with different vocations, and a thriving social life," does not have a political life, for it does not have the bargaining power. But to wield technical and political initiative is among the noblest activities of man, and as a syndicalist I feel that the units and regional complexes must be planned large enough to influence decisions. There is an underlying difference in spirit: Mumford aspires to harmony grounded in what he would call organic order, while I put more faith in independence, conflict, and emerging novelty.)

This excellent book has a surprising, even a startling, defect. In packed detail Mumford treats of dozens of societies and cultures, but at no point does he discuss what it is to grow up into these societies and cultures. There is nothing about child-rearing, child life, pedagogy, child and adolescent sexuality, vocational choice. This is odd. One thinks of John Dewey, interviewed on his septuagenarian second marriage and admitting with surprise to the reporter that in his many books on the conduct of life he had not once written about marriage! (He must have been a happy man, with never a problem.) Rather early in *The City in History* there is a charming quotation from a Sumerian letter of 3700 years ago, referring to an idle youth wandering the streets, and this leads Mumford to remark, "The city, as we first discover it, seems to belong exclusively to the adult population;" there are no playgrounds or schools. But it is a passing thought. To one's

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astonishment one never learns, in the thousands of succeeding years, what is taught, who is taught, how socialization takes place, what repression is enforced. Our author does not reflect on the human animal taking on the changing patterns of culture; so psychological reality is lacking in the story, it is without tension or drama.

The book is shy of psychology and psychologists. There is one slighting reference to Freud, a single more honorable mention of Jung. Mumford examines many things, including the body and the spirit, but not much the soul. Curiously, in his introductory chapters on pre-history, he draws heavily on psychoanalytic theory and body-imagery, with a dreamy yet quite persuasive effect; but then this method of interpretation vanishes. Sexually, for the most part his tone is hygienic; sometimes it betrays a mild puritanism; these are not the happiest attitudes for assaying the cultures of the world and there are some stuffy judgments. More important, he seems to be squeamish about the fact that *inter urinas et faeces nascimur*. In his pre-history, though he is clear about phallus and womb, he muffs the obvious oral and excretory interpretation of the irrigation and the canals. When he cites Xenophon's praise of Persian "refinement and modesty," he does not ask if these traits were not relevant to Persian ruliness. More important still, he tends to leave out the inarticulate, the dark, the confused, both that which is superstition and that which is too meaningful for speech. This leads him, for instance, to misinterpret the quality of intellect of high Athens, though his description of Athens as community and polis is splendid. The fact that the Mysteries were not spoken of does not prove they were slighted, but probably the contrary; and our author's complaint that the Socratic generation did not extend its reasoning to the general plan misses the possibility that the best use of reasoning is not to use it much, but as a life-preserving measure in chaos. The wise think only when they have to; thought is an emergency function.

Finally, may I suggest that Mumford's concept of the "organic" is a poor one for his purposes; it betrays what he means to affirm. A beehive or a termitary is an organically evolutionary development; and indeed the much-mentioned "noösphere" of Teilhard de Chardin, as the coming stage of our communications, amounts to precisely such a development. Yet this kind of cybernetics city is just what Mumford is against. I think that a better language to say what he wants would be the Aristotelian "physis" and "potentiality," for instance, that a culture must be continuous with natural powers.

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PATRICK CRUTTWELL

Fiction Chronicle

MANY ARE CALLED, but few are chosen. Many novels are sent for review to the editors of this journal, and by them dispatched to their Fiction Chronicler; but few of these can be actually chronicled. To the authors of the others, the chronicler apologises; for he knows well enough that to ignore a book is the worst of injuries. The fiercest denunciations are not half as harmful. I can only swear that I did at least read them all, and before proceeding to the dissection of the specimens chosen, I might offer my overall impression of what was sent me. They were not an outstanding consignment. No one, after reading them, would have thought: Here is a form of literary art—prose fiction—rigorously taught and carefully practised; here is a kind of tribal expression so highly valued by the tribe that only someone with a strong vocation and a finished technique would be even allowed to attempt it, let alone win applause by his efforts; here are the products of a School with Masters recognized and revered by all. No, no one would think that. One would think, rather, that here, in what we call prose fiction, is an extraordinary muddle of talent and opportunism, art and commerce; here are writers with a wide variety of bents and gifts all cramming themselves into this single form; here is an absolute lack of any accepted rules, models, or procedures. These are three openings, from among the novels I am to comment on:

> When Erica arrived in the big city it was the end of the war, it was winter and cold, and the fountains in the piazza were frozen. She went to live in a dark ground-floor apartment facing a courtyard scored with dark balconies full of screeching children. She too was a child, only four or five, and soon forgot the world she had lived in before. But she contined to have the same dreams as before.

> Because in the beginning, somebody or something somewhere said BE THERE! Not BE GOOD or BE BAD or BE-anything else-but-here in Augsburg on Christmas Eve. Said it not eighteen years ago when you were born (or thirty-five when she was), but way back there along with BE LIGHT and BE GONE when the whole round goddamned world was.
>
> Unless, maybe's Johnny's right after all and "goddamned" hasn't anything to do with it. Like the Ol' Man said back there in the Orderly Room last July when you handed him the cablegrams, sitting there like that with his feet on the desk and blowing the cigar smoke,

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saying, "All of which goes to prove the figure in the carpet's fornicating. Something you should have learned a long time ago, soldier. Because you should have had a pretty good idea . . ."

he was holding a letter in his hand, he raised his eyes looked at me then the letter again then once more at me, behind him I could see the red mahogany ochre blurs of the horses being led to the watering trough, the mud was so deep you sank into it up to your ankles but I remember that during the night it had frozen suddenly and Wack came into the bedroom with the coffee saying The dogs ate up the mud, I had never heard the expression I could almost see the dogs . . .

Between the bare directness of the first, the affected pretence at colloquialism of the second, and the equally affected interior mumblings of the third, there is nothing in common. The first one might call "traditional." No *avant garde* experiments lie behind it; as far as language goes, it might be the beginning of *Pride and Prejudice* or the *Divina Commedia*. The second has Hemingway behind it; the third Faulkner. Both these have the staleness of techniques already worn down by a thousand imitations. The difference continues in the later pages of the novels whose openings I have quoted. No. 1 tells its story plainly from A to Z; 2 and 3 play complex tricks with time and shift the viewpoints among narrators. But neither traditional nor experimental has real authority. The author of No. 1 I would judge to be at least as sophisticated as the authors of 2 and 3 (and basically far more intelligent): but could such a situation exist in verse? Couldn't you say with confidence that any writer of verse who, in 1961, still wrote in the manner of Tennyson, would be self-condemned? Such technical innocence or reaction would necessarily imply a disabling degree of naiveté or obtuseness. It is clearly not so in this realm of prose fiction. You can write with what technique you like, and your chances of success are unaffected. We are back where we started, then: this is an area of total confusion. But that is what it has always been. Many efforts have been made to bring it to order: none has succeeded. Lack of serious criticism has been suggested as the cause; but goodness knows we have had no lack of that since Henry James first brought that charge, and we seem no better off. Or commercialism may be blamed; but the novel has always been commercial, and since *Pamela*—which is 240 years—the bestseller has always been with us. Better admit what I think is the truth: that prose fiction is by its nature a formless and guideless way of writing, a way which offers a slipshod hospitality to almost every sort of talent and purpose, from the almost poetic, let us say, to the almost documentary. Lawrence saw this, and made a virtue of it. "The novel is the book of life . . . And only in the novel are *all* things given full play, or at least, they may be given full play." He was right to see that this all-inclusiveness is the praise of the novel; but he

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didn't see—or, more likely, didn't care—that this implies a resistance to the canons of art.

If this is true, then what are to be the criteria of a critic of novels? These, as it seems to me, are the only things he has any right to demand. First, that the work should have something to say—that it should make some comment on life which we can feel, for the moment at least, to be valid. Second, that it should incarnate this thing-to-be-said in persons and actions genuinely created; they may be based on real events and people, but they must not depend on these for their liveliness. And third, that this fictional creation, however remote it may be from the appearance of life as we live it, should be somehow credible, with whatever transposition, as a rendering of reality . . . And so—with these somewhat unsatisfactory weapons, let me tackle my assignment.

First we have six volumes of short or long-short stories: two American, one English, one Swedish, two Italian.[1] All of them deserve the minimal necessary praise: they are admirably readable. Above that, the differences begin. In the two Americans, Cheever and Swados, what an alien reader notices at once is how many of their stories are variants on a single theme—and the theme is: the nightmare behind the American dream. How much of American writing is saying just this: We are so prosperous—we are so successful—we mean so well—*why aren't we happy?* These stories invent fables of which that is the moral. Success is the Bitch Goddess in these stories, a certain corrupter; alcoholism—taken as a religion—is one way of resisting her. But at least there is resistance; the imagination is alive, however wild and bitter. In the English stories of Penelope Mortimer, there is a sense of extreme constriction. These stories are mostly domestic, claustrophobic, many told as by a woman or through a woman's perception. They are horribly depressing, exercises in the screaming nerve and the bottled-up hysteria. They are more precise, better contrived, than the American stories, but they pay for this by an imaginative life tamed and resigned. With the Americans, you feel they are looking for a way out; with the English, that everyone has known for years there is no way out. And what of the Swede? Stig Dagerman's *Games of Night* is a selection of stories by a writer who killed himself seven years ago at the age of 31—killed himself, apparently, because he had ceased to be able to write. I wonder if it is only knowledge of that which makes me feel in some of these strange stories a deeper resonance than anything in the Anglo-Saxons'? Strange they certainly are. They reminded me at once of Bergman's films; they have his blending of extreme physical and tactual reality

[1] NIGHTS IN THE GARDENS OF BROOKLYN, by *Harvey Swados*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $4.00. SOME PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS, etc., by *John Cheever*. Harper. $3.50. SATURDAY LUNCH WITH THE BROWNINGS, by *Penelope Mortimer*. McGraw-Hill. $3.95. THE GAMES OF NIGHT, by *Stig Dagerman*. Lippincott. $1.65. THE DARK AND THE LIGHT, by *Elio Vittorini*. New Directions. $3.75. THE FOX AND THE CAMELLIAS, by *Ignazio Silone*. Harper. $3.50.

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with unearthly fantasy. They render, as those films do, the pathos of uncouthness and inarticulacy and the sudden revelations which can come to the inarticulate and uncouth. There is often a nastiness about them, but it is a pathetic nastiness. They are Northern grotesques: very different from the Italians. Elio Vittorini's *The Dark and the Light* is utterly Latin: dry, clear, controlled, never insistent. The first of my quoted openings is the beginning of one of the two *novelle* in this volume. This story, *Erica,* tells how a fourteen-year-old girl, abandoned by her parents, struggled to keep herself and two younger children alive, and eventually, almost by accident, finds the way to do it, prostitution. The quality of the story comes from the interplay between the sordid horror of what is told and the almost-fairytale manner of its telling; the effect is to give exactly the child's half-knowledge, half-ignorance. I thought it perhaps the most accomplished, most moving and satisfying piece of writing in all the works sent me. Ignazio Silone's *The Fox and the Camellias* is not quite on that level of intensity; but it is an admirable fable, light, crisp, allusive, with deeper meanings present but not obtruding.

Next are two novels,[2] which tackle one of the major subjects of our time—the ending of white domination over the non-white races. One shows it happening in Asia, the other in Africa. "One of the major subjects of our time"—that has its attractions, but its dangers too. It is all too easy to imagine that because the subject is major, the work also must be major. But of course it doesn't follow. The scales of importance for newspaper headlines and for imaginative writing may coincide (as in *War and Peace*), but they may be utterly different—and then you get an *Emma,* which was published in the year after Waterloo. What must be asked of the writer who takes the headline-importancies for his subject is that he should be more than just a newspaper reader of them: that his imagination should have worked itself all round them and turned them completely into human beings and their actions. Good intentions, bright ideas, enlightened opinions, are no substitutes. The novel may have them too, and so much the better if it has: but what it must have is imaginative knowledge. By that criterion, I find Gerald Hanley's *The Journey Homeward* a success and Tom Stacey's *The Brothers M* a failure. Each has for its centre the return from Europe to his native land of an Oriental or African who has been deeply westernized. In Hanley's book, the return is to a hill-state in India; in Stacey's, to central Africa. In the former, the return is made just after the native land has acquired independence; in the latter, the struggle is still on. In both, the returners are spoiled for living among their own people; in both, the ends are tragic. But whereas in Hanley's novel the characters are totally alive, as people alone, and their country convincingly real whether you know India or not, in Stacey's the char-

[2] THE JOURNEY HOMEWARD, by *Gerald Hanley*. World Publishing Co., $4.50. THE BROTHERS M, by *Tom Stacey*. Pantheon Books. $5.95.

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acters are dismally types and nothing more and their country is like a Technicolor travelogue. I have a suspicion that the reason for this difference may be found in another difference. Hanley's picture of India and the Indians is full of humour; Stacey's of Africa and the Africans is grimly humourless. To be too earnest with the political thinker's kind of earnestness can be fatal to the other kind of seriousness which is the artist's; it can make impossible that impartial amoral creativeness which Keats was pointing to when he said that Shakespeare took as much pleasure in Iago as in Desdemona. Lose that, and your novel becomes a tract. Tracts must be short: and *The Brothers M* is very, very long. But *The Journey Homeward* is a true novel, and a good one. It views its Indians with sympathy but without sentimentality; it is amused by them but is not condescending about them.

Then comes a pair[3] which have this in common: that both have for subject the Artist as Hero. In Cassill's *Clem Anderson,* the artist is a writer; in John Bratby's *Breakdown,* he is a painter. To make a fictional character out of an artist is notoriously difficult: but why? I suppose because the artist, by definition, is himself articulate; he ought to be speaking for himself, not being spoken of by someone else. Also because his art, which is the only thing about him that makes him "different," can hardly be invented successfully by the novelist, who has his own art to invent. Lawrence Durrell's Pursewarden, in the Alexandrian quartet, wrecks his creator's claims for him by the dreadful stuff presented us as the fruits of his genius; and in *Clem Anderson,* we are given lengthy excerpts from the hero's writings—which are unhappily indistinguishable in style from the work of his creator. But if the art is completely left out of the novelist's picture, then what is left may seem pointless: why all these ragings, agonies, nervous crises and resorts to the bottle, if we are not shown what came of them or if what we are shown seems not worth all the bother? Especially when—as is certainly the case with *Clem Anderson*—the artist-hero is conceived in the high Romantic-Bohemian mode, the self-doomed wild one, the larger than life, the shocker of respectability. Clem Anderson has a good deal of Dylan Thomas and a good deal of Thomas Wolfe; he is lusty, sexy, drinky, peripatetically outrageous—and a fearful bore. (But I don't think the last was intended.) The novel itself, to be frank, is a mess: enormously too long, employing to no purpose except the reader's irritation a shuffling to and fro of time-schemes, and written throughout in an unselective characterless prose. Yet there is something here. The narrator is interesting, much more so than the hero; individual episodes come alive; if Mr. Cassill can discipline himself, write something short, plain, and *not* about geniuses, he may yet do well. In the meantime, he seems very immature: and this is where *Breakdown* scores by contrast. For it too is a mess—but a mess intended, like *Tristram*

[3] CLEM ANDERSON, by *R. V. Cassill.* Simon and Schuster. $5.95. BREAKDOWN, by *John Bratby.* World Publishing Co. $4.95.

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Shandy. It is a book by a professional painter, John Bratby, about a professional painter, James Brady. It has illustrations by John Bratby which include several portraits of James Brady that bear a close resemblance to self-portraits by John Bratby. John Bratby denies with vigour that the book is autobiographical. I expect he is right. I take it to be a fantasy of what might happen if J.B. (*that* keeps me safe!) actually did all the things that J.B. sometimes imagines he might do—if, as he puts it, the animal inside him broke out of its cage of order and success and family-love. It does get out—that is the "breakdown" of the title. And what happens then is a fine farrago of picaresque adventures: some just credible, some wildly fantastic; some funny, some macabre. There is a lot of horse-sense in the book, a lot of nonsense, and a positive mental ward-ful of female crackpots. I hesitate to recommend *Breakdown,* as I would to recommend *Tristram Shandy*. I would only say that you will either like it very much, or find it a complete waste of your time. But at least you will find it different.

Lastly, we have three novels[4] of which the common feature—somewhat tenuous, I agree—is that all are in some way "experimental"—or modern—or *avant garde*. Odd that we have no agreed word for it, though we all know what we mean by it: odd, and perhaps significant, for it may be a sign that though the "experimental" novel has been with us now for nearly fifty years, its status is still uneasy, it is not yet entirely naturalised. At any rate, the effect of two of these three—Bankowsky's *After Pentecost* and Simon's *The Flanders Road*—is to make me wonder very seriously if we are not paying too high a price for the occasional achievements of one or two geniuses by acquiring a mass of unreadability provided by their followers. In both these books the influences are pretty clear—Hemingway in parts, Faulkner more widely—and even clearer is the conclusion that original artists can be the worst of models. Simon's Faulknerese is grotesque; if it were meant to be parody, it would be superb parody except that it isn't funny. It just goes on and on and on and, yes, *on,* like this—but why quote? I have done so already; the third of my specimen openings is Simon's and that is a mild example. Bankowsky is better: if you grit your teeth and work hard, you can make out what's happening as you hop around between 1926 and 1946, backward and forward and hither and yonder. But *why?* That is the real question: *why?* What essential purpose is being served? what valid effects are made thus which could not have been made any other way? I am afraid that what we have here is imitation without absorption, discipleship without comprehension. And complete indifference to the reader. This, to me, is the most sinister thing. Joyce is said to have replied, to someone who asked him how much he expected from his readers, that he expected "the study of a lifetime." The

[4] AFTER PENTECOST, by *Richard Bankowsky*. Random House. $4.95. THE FLANDERS ROAD, by *Claude Simon*. Braziller. $4.00. A SEVERED HEAD, by *Iris Murdoch*. Viking Press. $3.95.

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story may be invented; its spirit is only too real. The arrogance of the modern artist: obverse of his neglect. His enormous self-importance: compensation for his real unimportance.

These accusations, at least, cannot be brought against Iris Murdoch. What she is up to in *A Severed Head* may be obscure, but at any rate the surface is transparent, the narrative has an orderly shape, the syntax and punctuation are those of sane and literate persons, and when one epithet is sufficient, she uses one. (Simon prefers half a dozen.) These are great virtues. But—but—all the same—I must confess that *A Severed Head* beats me. It deals with the amorous interchangings among—let us see—Martin Lynch-Gibbon, a London wine-merchant, Alexander, his sculptor brother, Antonia, his wife, Georgie, his mistress (a University lecturer), Palmer Anderson, an American psychiatrist, and Palmer's half-sister, Honor Klein (another University lecturer). Several paragraphs—or a series of diagrams—would be needed to narrate who beds with whom and in what order: let me say merely that virtually every possible permutation is accounted for, incest not barred and homosexuality faintly present. And I do not believe one little word of it. Not one. Symbolism rumbles and mutters throughout; there is a perpetual fog, which is only too appropriate; and for a time I was trying my best with the characters' names. (Lynch-Gibbon: old-style gentry. Alexander: the conqueror. Georgie: masculine. Palmer: the pilgrim. Honor: honor. But it broke down and I gave it up.) On no level at all, that I could see, was any of it credible. A pity: for Miss Murdoch can write, and her reputation in post-war England, though far too high, is not without reason. What seems to have happened with *A Severed Head* is that private whimsicality, always her danger, has got the bit between its teeth. It has bolted her over the boundary between the strange and the ridiculous, between the imaginative and the whimsical. Let us hope that with her next book she will stay on the right side.

JOHN SIMON

The Theater Critic and His Double[1]

IN HIS PREVIOUS BOOK, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky,* George Steiner set up straw men who raised the question "Can 'tragedy' signify anything if we use it at once of *Antigone,* of *King Lear,* and of *Phèdre?*" Ask a

[1] THE DEATH OF TRAGEDY, by *George Steiner.* Knopf. $5.00. CURTAINS, by *Kenneth Tynan.* Atheneum. $7.95.

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foolish question, and you will, if you are George Steiner, get up a bookful of foolish answers.

In *The Death of Tragedy,* Mr. Steiner's thesis is that tragedy, after its glorious heyday in Greece, and again, though in quite different trappings, in Elizabethan England, made its farewell appearance in 17th-century France. Thereupon, because science and optimism, commercialism, and the rise of the masses replaced myths, heroic individualism, and the sacramental-tragic view of life, tragedy went into an inexorable decline. The romantics tried to redeem it from its dreary neoclassical crawl by crossbreeding the prize-winning stables of Pericles and Elizabeth, but because the novel and prose had by now come into their own, the old and true verse tragedy was doomed except for a few flukes. With Ibsen and Chekhov it raises once again its lovely, though prosified, head—but only about shoulder-high: when disaster can be averted by "saner economic relations and better plumbing," tragedy is no longer the inevitable human condition and we can barely recognize the vestiges of the old dramatic flame. The same goes for the heirs of Ibsen and Chekhov, despite some exceptions, i.e., plays that Steiner is particularly fond of. Then comes a brief but quaint conclusion: tragedy is either indeed dead, or still dimly present without our being quite aware of it, or about to reappear in its full glory. With the body of Steiner's argument one can, by and large, hardly disagree, because it is, or should be, common knowledge; with his triple conclusion one can quarrel even less: no doubt about it, tragedy is either dead, or alive, or about to be born. Besides eating his tragedy and having it too, Steiner can feed on the dream of tragedy to come.

Disregarding the triple crown which the end bestows on this work, *The Death of Tragedy* is in its outline not much different from the average sophomore course in "World Drama." Where it does differ, however, is in its detail, in which it is worse. And I speak as one who has little enough respect for courses in world drama. Let us turn, then, to a pair of typical passages from the book which illustrate what I shall call, for lack of a worse word, Steiner's method.

We are given, first, 1782 as the date of Schiller's *Die Räuber,* which was performed in 1781 and written three or four years earlier. Presently Schiller is described as "a true romantic." Now Schiller was never a romantic, not even an untrue one, a fact which Mr. Steiner must know as well as the next Fellow of Churchill College. But he is, as always, trying to construct schemata: between Racine and Ibsen there must be only one theatre of any importance, the romantic (this simplifies matters for reader and writer alike), and so Mr. Steiner makes romantics out of Schiller, Lenz, Büchner, Alfieri, even Dostoevsky and Valéry—enough enforced conversions to do an Ottoman or Jesuit proud. Next we are told that "Schiller's treatments of Greek mythology are among the sources of that special kind of Hellenism which cast its spell over the German mind from Winckelmann to Nietzsche." Since Schiller was

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nine years old when Winckelmann died, I doubt that his influence on Winckelmann's Hellenism was more than marginal; but I am eager to find out what this special kind of Hellenism was, and how it differed from that of, say, Byron and Shelley, or Guérin and Nerval?

Hereupon we learn that "it is with Schiller that began the explicit search for tragic forms appropriate to the rational, optimistic, and sentimental temper of post-Pascalian man." Note the historicizing: the new drama begins with Schiller, the new world view commences with Pascal. Steiner is a great one for firsts—as well as lasts—and so we shall forthwith have Byron promoted to Schiller's first for being more daring than Schiller, and "contain[ing] the preliminaries of radical modern drama." After that, there will be Kleist, the last tragedian in the old sense, or, rather, the last last since Racine, who was also a last. After that comes Büchner who "poses in a new way the entire problem of modern tragedy," and then Ibsen with whom "the history of the drama begins anew." Steiner totally disregards the not insignificant drama of Lessing, which is every bit as "post-Pascalian" as Schiller's, and earlier to boot; but Lessing is so entrenched in the Enlightenment that even Steiner cannot hoist him into romanticism. Thus there is no discussion of Lessing, nor, for comparable reasons, of Hebbel, Zola, Becque, Hauptmann, the expressionists, Synge, O'Casey, or even of the tragic Goethe: a play like *Tasso* is said to be too autobiographical to be truly tragic, which settles that.

Now take Steiner on Byron, who, it seems, was "trying to draw . . . drama away from Shakespeare and toward the classicism of Jonson and Otway." If there is anything the history-of-ideas approach needs even more than firsts and lasts, it is movements and schools. So we have Otway joining the ranks of the classicists, even though in his best plays he was striving, counter to neoclassical trends, toward Shakespeare and even Tudor domestic tragedy. But Mr. Steiner needs a school or tradition, and since his taking-off point is *Marino Faliero,* his mind leaps, not so much by free as by enforced association, to another Venetian play, and so Otway must toe the line.

After a quotation from *Sardanapalus,* we are treated to this comment: "As in much of the finest of Byron's poetry we are near to a middle ground between verse and an intensely charged prose." We wonder, first, just what that middle ground between verse and poetic prose might be: something like the middle ground between Texas and New Mexico or between water and steam? But even granted the existence of such a middle ground, how could something standing *between* poetry and prose *be* poetry? From this we must conclude that Byron's poetry is usually at its best when it is not poetry at all. The cunning Mr. Steiner, of course, says this poetry stands *near* such a middle ground, but then: to which side of it? I think the only solution would be a map.

Next, we learn that when in Byron a breeze "crisps the broad and rolling water," this is as "Horatian" as Ben Jonson's "most Latinate

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conceit, where the wind crisps the 'heads' of rivers." Obviously for this conceit to be a conceit, *heads* is essential; without it the statement is not even metaphoric. But if *crisps* alone suffices to make a Latinate, Horatian conceit, then instead of on cereal, I have been breakfasting on epodes. Again, in "Though they came down/ And marshall'd me the way in all their brightness,/ I would not follow," Steiner admires "the Latin sonority of 'marshall'd' which gives the romantic boast its persuasion." The most modest dictionary could have told Mr. Steiner that *marshal* comes from the Old High German *marahscalc,* a horse-servant, which is as devoid of romantic persuasion as of Latin sonority. But Mr. Steiner, evidently equating *marshal* with *martial,* has hit upon a new discipline, etymology by homonymy, a kind of equation, or equitation, which should yield no end of pleasurable horseplay. "Could any other English poet since Milton have written that verse?" Steiner asks, remembering that Milton was a Latinate poet who, therefore, skilfully marshaled such Germanic words. At present count I can name 229 poets who could have, but by the time Mr. Steiner gets in touch with me the number should have risen considerably.

"Sardanapalus," Mr. Steiner acutely observes, "resembles a Delacroix." This, since Delacroix, too, was a tormented romantic, indeed a Byronist, and did in fact paint a "Sardanapalus," is about as revealing an insight as if we were told that Blake's graphic art resembles his poetry which it illustrates. We learn also that Byron's plays are "what the Germans call *Lesedramen,"* which, for Mr. Steiner's benefit, is what we call closet drama, but that would be too plain and simple (which the Germans call *einfach*). These dramas now require fancifully formal recitation because of their sumptuousness—though one page earlier they consisted of "plain, rapid monosyllables"; they now "look resolutely to the past," though on the preceding page they carried "forward from the best of Ben Jonson." To cap this farrago, we are told that Byron is different from Shakespeare, for "Byron, on the contrary, rejoins the tradition of the medieval mystery cycle." But only a little before Steiner was stressing Shakespeare's dependence on the medieval.

Anyone not yet convinced of the level *The Death of Tragedy* manages remarkably to maintain might want to consider that Mr. Steiner refers throughout to one Macauley [*sic*]; that an *army* and *unreality* become *troupe* and *irreality* [*sic, sic*]; that "commensurate *with,"* to be *exorcised,* to be *racked* by despair, become "commensurate *to,"* *exorcized,* and *wracked* [*sic, sic, sic*], and so on. Mr. Steiner is, however, not without imagination, as when, for instance, he rewrites Wagner, and has not the Pope's but Tannhäuser's staff putting forth leaves. Nor is he lacking in resourcefulness, as when, ignorant of Spanish drama, he nonetheless manages to drop Calderón's name half a dozen times at strategic intervals, to make it appear in the index at least that he has said something on the subject. And he displays his neo-critical subtlety when, for example, he turns Woyzeck's touching

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baby-talk addressed to his young son into the throwing away of words by someone who feels betrayed by language.

Let me summarize: Steiner's book is made up of commonplaces, absurd generalizations, distortions of fact to suit the absurd generalizations, and a style which is either the endless parataxis of the Hymarx Outlines, or a bizarre attempt at "fine writing." The outstanding feature is the impartiality with which Steiner can uphold both sides of any argument. Modern drama falls from grace, we learn, when it is forced into prose, the language of our times; yet Lear's madness, it seems, finds its most tragic expression in prose, and had Goethe stuck to prose, *Faust* would have been a real tragedy. There is Christian tragedy (p. 194); there can be no Christian tragedy (p. 332). *Caligula* (1938) and *No Exit* (1944) are too recent for discussion; *Mother Courage* (1941) and Anouilh's *Antigone* (1944) are not. And then the superpalinode of the last chapter: drama, or tragedy, may be alive, after all. The ultimate question, of course, is: do we need a book on the death of tragedy? As Dürrenmatt observed in his witty and incisive booklet *Theaterprobleme,* every type of drama makes use of the opportunities of its time; the *coups* of one sort of theatre are not those of another, but a period without dramatic opportunities would be hard to find. Similarly, Kenneth Tynan distinguishes two tragic actions, strangulation by fate and defeat by society. To be defeated by society, whether through one's own fault, like Uncle Vanya, or through society's, like Blanche DuBois, is, I think, as tragic as any tragedy. Jove's thunderbolt is as optional as iambics; only the playwright's wisdom and images are indispensable, and his sense of the anguish and hopelessness of the struggle.

In writing *The Death of Tragedy,* Mr. Steiner was plainly relishing the notion of being the priest who ministers at the burial of a grand theme, at whose baptism Nietzsche officiated: to fulfill the *Gestalt,* there ought to be, presumably, *The Death of Tragedy* after *The Birth.* But things do not proceed so logically in the history of criticism. Mr. Steiner, for example, was able to die as a critic without ever having been born. Still, there are those whom he can charm: *Time, The Times,* Alfred Knopf, and C. P. Snow, who just made him Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge. But Sir Charles, who says that Steiner "belongs to the Edmund Wilsons of this world," obviously suffers from some kind of double vision. Thus he sees, apparently, two Edmund Wilsons where there is only one admittedly large one, two cultures where one wonders whether there is even one, and a whole wit in George Steiner.

There may be drama critics of greater erudition, or more potent charm, or truer professional aptitude than Kenneth Tynan. But on the evidence of *Curtains,* his collected writings on drama during the fifties, I doubt that there is anyone now writing drama criticism in English who possesses all three of those essentials to Mr. Tynan's degree. Since

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I am talking about someone who comes so close to what I consider perfection, I may as well set down my specifications for the ideal drama critic.

Of erudition, he needs three kinds. First, the literary, and Tynan is at home with anyone from Johannes Rhenanus to Amanda McKittrick Ros, from Jules Michelet to Zelda Fitzgerald. He can also spot the tiniest tinkering with any classical text in production. Secondly, the critical, and Tynan is steeped in the writings of such earlier English critics as G. H. Lewes, Beerbohm, Shaw, Agate, C. E. Montague, A. B. Walkley, Desmond MacCarthy; as well as Americans like George Jean Nathan, Stark Young, and Harold Clurman. Thirdly, knowledge of stage history, of which Tynan has, if anything, too much: some of his earlier reviews, such as that of the Old Vic's 1953 *Merchant of Venice,* suffer a little from excessive historical asides. But, on the whole, Tynan does not parade his erudition, and that is part of his charm.

Under charm, I would put three subheadings. First wit, of which Mr. Tynan has a superabundance. When his sallies come off (and they usually do), they are germane to the matter at hand, illuminating, and irresistible. Thus both the kittenish sexiness and histrionic limitations of Miss Leigh are captured in "As Lavinia, Vivien Leigh receives the news that she is about to be ravished on her husband's corpse with little more than the mild annoyance of one who would have preferred foam rubber." And not only a particular failure of Anouilh's, but French contentiousness too, is ribbed in "*Pauvre Bitos* . . . has split Paris into two camps—those who dislike it, and those who detest it." Even a mere slogan like "Judith Anderson's armpit rhetoric" has more pungency than meets the eye. Style comes next, and few critics have such a creative way with imagery as Mr. Tynan, when, for example, he pinpoints the basic problem of *Look Back in Anger:* "two attractive young animals engaged in competitive martyrdom, each with its teeth sunk deep in the other's neck, and each reluctant to break the clinch for fear of bleeding to death." It is delightful to watch in *Curtains* how the style gains in assurance with the passage of years, until such 1959 pieces as the review of Corwin's *The Rivalry,* or the tribute to Olivier's Coriolanus, or the summing-up pieces on French and German theatre are marvels of poised, judicious evocativeness. Lastly, there is likableness, and Mr. Tynan with his modesty, his willingness to learn, his remarkable kindness for one with such an arsenal of epigrams, is eminently likable.

Professional aptitude consists, first, of a working knowledge of the practical theatre, which Tynan, a former actor, assuredly possesses. He abounds also in the second subcategory, taste, which I shall concisely define as differing from my opinion no more than once or twice per every hundred judgments. Thirdly, he possesses flexibility, enabling him, at times, to transcend his own tenets. Fourthly, he enjoys his trade, and, rare among critics, often returns to a play once or even more

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times. Last, and most important, he has a point of view. Over the years, Mr. Tynan has moved from a position of pure aestheticism to one of intense social commitment. Thus we find him preferring by 1955 Shakespeare's histories to the tragedies. In 1958 he tells us that "to be civilised nowadays is to care about society and to feel a responsible part of it." "A serious dramatist who analyzes personal problems without analyzing the social problems that encircle and partly create them is neglecting a good half of his job," writes Tynan in 1959; and again: "No dramatist is an island." This leads Tynan to turn against Ionesco and Beckett, as not being *engagé;* and to overpraise poor plays like *Flowering Cherry, Summer of the Seventeenth Doll,* and *Death of a Salesman,* even an amateurish concoction of Pearl Buck's, because of their commitment. Finally, Tynan goes so far as to equate Strindberg's nihilism, if such it be, with brilliant lying. This strikes me as sad. It is not only from Brecht and Miller that one can learn, as Tynan says he did, that all drama is political. A play by Strindberg or, yes, even such a fragment of a dramatic monologue as Mallarmé's *Faune,* is political: a lesson in rejection of human vulgarity and stupidity—a slap in mankind's face, or mere dignified disdain. This too, in a broad sense, is political, only it happens to be opposed to Mr. Tynan's politics. But even so, I admire Tynan for having a political or philosophical stance, adhering to it, and still, as much as he can, applauding sheer style.

It may be safely claimed that Mr. Tynan is the critical representative of the Angry Young Men. He was at Oxford with Wain and Amis, is a friend and fan of John Osborne, and knows the whole movement from its Braine down to its Sillitoe. Hence the emphasis on social values, and, in particular, on a certain genteel leftism. Hence, too, a cosmopolitanism, an *unanimisme,* that lifts him happily out of British insularity. One wishes it might go so far as to improve his French when misquoting, of all people, Mallarmé; or when misspelling the Lady of the Camellias—who for some reason seems to haunt him—"Marguérite" Gautier. But even in his lapses Mr. Tynan is charming; with just one supererogatory acute accent he manages to gild three flowers: the daisy, the camellia, *and* the lily. Happily, though, Mr. Tynan never forgets his 1956 dictum about drama critics: "What counts is not their opinion, but the art with which it is expressed." No matter how *engagé* he may be, he is always engaging.

Put *Curtains* beside *The Death of Tragedy:* it is a patchwork quilt of occasional pieces compared to a single essay. Paradoxically, it is *Curtains* that offers a coherent point of view and sustained revelation. It is to Steiner's book as the living body of drama to its scattered bones.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

Important and Unimportant Poems[1]

READERS OF VERSE, particularly the young, are becoming more and more dissatisfied with the status quo, and are turning away from the official standards with disgust. The award of the Pulitzer Prize to Phyllis McGinley, a writer of light suburban verse, shows that their dissatisfaction is right; if this state of things is perpetuated by the old men who hold the strings, there will be a complete break between the young and the old. It is all very well for a Tate, a Blackmur, a Bogan, to consult their own tastes and ignore what is being done now in this country. (These were not, as far as I know, the dispensers of the Pulitzer; the judges are shrouded in anonymity—I list these names only as a representative selection of poetry officials, poet-critics, arbiters of prestige.) But the result of their indifference will surely be that, in about five years or so, their opinions will seem completely irrelevant. Wherever the young may look for direction, it is certainly not to them; and in poetry the young are always right. The universities have established Brooks-and-Warren as the official way of reading poetry exactly at the point where Brooks-and-Warren are of no further use to poets. As usual, the old are talking about matters that happened thirty years ago. The good poetry being written in America today is turning its back upon the taste of Eliot's generation, just as Eliot turned away from the standards of J. C. Squire. Thirty years from now, the universities will be reading Whitman, Rilke, Neruda, and other poets of imagination—and they will again be out of touch. The Pulitzer prize that should have been awarded in 1961 will be awarded in 1991.

The present disparity between performance and reputation is appalling. Take William Stafford, for example. Is Stafford really so far inferior to Robert Lowell that Lowell should be treated as a classic, and Stafford virtually unknown? I have the greatest respect for the author of *Lord Weary's Castle*—clearly he is one of the few significant poets of the age—but when I read the poems of Stafford, I must respect him also, and yet who, outside of a few readers, is aware of Stafford?

[1] WEST OF YOUR CITY, by *William Stafford*. The Talisman Press. $5.00. SAY PARDON, by *David Ignatow*. Wesleyan University Press. $1.25. THE OPENING OF THE FIELD, by *Robert Duncan*. Grove Press. $1.45. THE DRUNK IN THE FURNACE, by *W. S. Merwin*. Macmillan. $1.25. THE DISTANCES, by *Charles Olson*. Grove Press. $1.75. POEMS, by *Alan Dugan*. Yale University Press. $3.00. THE COMPLETE POEMS OF CAVAFY. Harcourt, Brace & World. $6.75. POEMS, by *George Seferis*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $3.75. SIX POETS OF MODERN GREECE. Alfred A. Knopf. $5.00. SUMMONED BY BELLS, by *John Betjeman*. Houghton Mifflin. $3.00. HALFWAY, by *Maxine W. Kumin*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $3.95.

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What a concatenation of critics, what sheer ignorance, must control the American literary scene, for such a disparity to exist!

This is a poem from Stafford's *West of Your City:*

AT THE BOMB TESTING SITE

At noon in the desert a panting lizard
waited for history, its elbows tense,
watching the curve of a particular road
at if something might happen.

It was looking at something farther off
than people could see, an important scene
acted in stone for little selves
at the flute end of consequences.

There was just a continent without much on it
under a sky that never cared less.
Ready for a change, the elbows waited.
The hands gripped hard on the desert.

Stafford's subject-matter is usually important in itself. (The theory that subject-matter is nothing, the treatment everything, was invented to comfort little minds.) Also, he deals with his subject directly; that is to say, he has a personal voice. Contrary to what many poets believe nowadays, it is not necessary to spill your guts on the table in order to be "personal," nor to relate the details of your aunt's insanity. What is necessary is originality of imagination and at least a few ideas of your own. Another point in favor of Stafford is that he actually writes about the country he is living in; all sorts of ordinary places, people and animals appear in his poems, and not as subjects of satire, but with the full weight of their own existence. As we read Stafford we are aware of how much has been omitted from modern American poetry only because it is not literary, or because it springs from the life of ordinary, rather than "alienated" people. An observer from another country would be struck by the absence from American poetry of the American landscape; he would find, also, that the language of our poetry is not the language of our real thoughts; and he might wonder at the psychic disorder this indicates. As for history—it seems we are trying to forget it. But Stafford is one of the few poets who are able to use the landscape and to feel the mystery and imagination in American life:

Light wind at Grand Prairie, drifting snow.
Low at Vermilion, forty degrees of frost.
Lost in the Barrens, hunting over spines of ice,
the great sled dog Shadow is running for his life.

He is a poet of the people, in the deepest and most meaningful sense. And a poet of Nature—in a time when poets claim our attention because they are unnatural, pitiable, demoralized. His poems are strong and true; rightly understood, they will enrich our lives.

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David Ignatow, who writes mainly about New York City, is also original, and of course, equally ignored. For years I have read his poems with exasperation because they so stubbornly refused to fall into happy patterns. Should a poem really begin like this?

I'm in New York covered by a layer of soap foam.

And if the following is a poem, what are most of the verses taught in schoolrooms?

THE DREAM

Someone approaches to say his life is ruined
and to fall down at your feet
and pound his head upon the sidewalk.
Blood spreads in a puddle.
And you, in a weak voice, plead
with those nearby for help;
your life takes on his desperation.
He keeps pounding his head.
It is you who are fated;
and you fall down beside him.
It is then you are awakened,
the body gone, the blood washed from the ground,
the stores lit up with their goods.

Resistance to this kind of poem, I believe, is not merely on literary grounds—it is also a social matter. Some critic ought to consider the *influence of social snobbery upon our literary judgments.* Mr. Ignatow's poems, because they deal with ordinary life—the confined, sweating, hallucinatory life of a city—will not be liked by those who prefer genteel, literary poems. And such readers will miss the charity and tenderness that illuminate his work. It is as though Mr. Ignatow, like some odd angel, has come down to live among machines and bills of lading, in order to change them into poetry and enable men to endure them:

THE ERRAND BOY II

It was the way he went to pick up the carton
fallen to the gutter from his handtruck,
his arms outstretched, his body stooping
to the ground. I wondered at his smile,
weary and amused and so gentle withal,
as if this was what he had expected,
not for the first time and not
for the last time either.

And this is the poet of whom a reviewer, who shall surely be Nameless, said that he needed to "grow some wings"!

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In spite of the fragments of in-group talk and theory that litter the poems of Robert Duncan, the reader is soon aware that he is in the presence of an extraordinary lyrical talent. I call it lyrical because, like Pound, Mr. Duncan is strongest when he is expressing his joy—and weakest when he is compounding mythology or history. It is not that he cannot present general ideas coherently—"A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" is a magnificent play of ideas, with a striking, directly stated discussion of history in the second part; but too often he utters gnomic fragments, literary references, dates, names, as though their lodgement in his mind were enough to make them poetic. On the other hand, he has a wonderful quality of light—like Blake's, his words are permeated with light; these are visionary lyrics. The lines advance with suppleness, pause to digest some intractable matter, and advance again. Always, in even the most reluctant of his poems, one finds a delight in the act of poetry itself—these are really poems about being a poet; only in an age of prose would this be considered a limited subject.

The light and movement are in these lines:

> *The light foot hears you and the brightness begins*
> god-step at the margins of thought,
> quick adulterous tread at the heart.
> Who is it that goes there?
> Where I see your quick face
> notes of an old music pace the air,
> torso-reverberations of a Grecian lyre.

Here is Mr. Duncan's startling, prophetic turning of a phrase:

> He wrestled with Sleep like a man reading a strong sentence.

And here, unfortunately, is the detritus of his reading:

> honord by verse that preserves
> Hippokleas, first of the boys
> in the double course at Delphi;
>
> Ford Madox Ford as well; or
>
> Mr. W. H., half in half out of ground . . .

The most important poems in W. S. Merwin's *The Drunk in the Furnace* are those that deal with ancestors, country characters and landscapes. There are good poems too, in an earlier manner; poems about the sea in which natural objects gather emblematic significance—but I have always found these poems rather contrived, and not sufficiently differentiated in form, one from the other. The new poems, however, show a decision on Merwin's part to change, if not his lines, at least his preoccupations. It is a strange movement, when you think about it, from the extraordinary literary brilliance of his first book, to this

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simplicity. He has never lacked imagination; it is good to see this imagination applied to the American scene. His new poems are rather like short stories—their effect does not depend on individual lines, but on the whole; I will therefore not attempt to quote them. He is certainly one of the most intelligent, and one of the least obsequious, of the younger poets; I wish he would become astonishing as soon as possible.

A publisher announces his master-of-the-week: "Charles Olson has come to be regarded as a major American poet by many leading literary figures, including William Carlos Williams." Did ever any country have as many major poets as there are in the United States at this moment? And most of them seem to have, or to have once had, advertisements from Dr. Williams. Here is a sample of this major poetry:

> From the beginning, SIN
> and the reason, note, known from the start
>
> says Mr. bradford: As it is with waters when
> their streames are stopped or damed up, wickedness
> (Morton, Morton, Morton). . . .

I particularly like "Morton, Morton, Morton"; it is the kind of touch that has made our major poetry famous throughout the world—"O Sophonisba, Sophonisba O!"

Mr. Charles Olson may seem dull—but he is dull on principle. He has written a prose essay to explain his poetics—I wish he would write another, to explain his prose—and indeed, his poetry needs a theory to make it interesting. There is small feeling in his verse, except a touch of nostalgia or irascibility, as in the poem where he complains that a college has invited him to be present at a celebration of the centennial of *Moby Dick*. And what a small world he must inhabit, for such an incident to loom so large in it! As for his style, here is a specimen:

> the ratios 5/8, 8/13
> in the seed-cones of fir-trees,
> the ratio 21/34
> in normal daisies
> Pendactylism is general in the animal kingdom . . .

Such are the delights that Mr. Olson holds for his readers. With what dreadful solemnity, what pedantry, are these trivia presented! And—no doubt the first characteristic of a major poet—how he imitates! If Pound did not exist, neither would these poems. I would be tempted to call Mr. Olson a poet *manqué,* had I not read his prose.

The danger in trying to write poetry that sounds like prose is that you may succeed. Poetry is irreconcilably different from prose—and if you are thinking of Pound's remark that poetry must be as well written as prose, nevertheless Pound did not say that poetry should *be* prose;

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and besides, he knew what was needed in his time, but that time is long past. American poetry is suffocating in prose at a time when what it most needs is imagination. The prevalence of prose in American poetry is a curious thing. It is as though poets were writing in reaction against a supreme rhetoric; as though there were, overtopping us all, a Victor Hugo whose magnificent rhetoric demanded that we revolt against it by writing in the language of businessmen or, like Pound, in a folk idiom taken from *Our American Cousin*. But there is no such rhetorical style; therefore, the writing of poems as prose must have some other cause and serve some other purpose. I believe that it is the idea of being a poet that is being attacked. What this verse says, in effect, is: "See, I'm just a regular guy!" But insofar as poets are ordinary, they are not poets; and prose-poetry must be inferior to prose fiction, which at least has some interest of characterization or narrative.

Mr. Alan Dugan is addicted to prose-poetry. Here is an extract of his verse, without the divisions of lines: "Picked up, a hermit crab who seems to curl up in a dead snail's shell from cowardice, attacks the thumb sustaining him in extraordinary air, regardless, and if he is attacked by borers or the other enemies of shells, he crawls out, raw at the rear!, to find a new place, thus exposed . . ." It is not only the flatness of language that makes this prose, but also lack of feeling or urgency—which, of course, accounts for the flatness. There is something slightly wrong about Mr. Dugan's feelings. When we examine his poems, we find what I can only describe as insincerity. It may seem unfair to him to compare his "Funeral Oration for a Mouse" with Burns's poem on a mouse, but as Mr. Dudley Fitts in his introduction to the book has already called for the comparison, and as this poem by Mr. Dugan is typical of his method, I will pursue the matter. Here is Mr. Dugan on the mouse:

> So,
> Lord, accept our felt though minor guilt
> for an ignoble foe and ancient sin:
> the murder of a guest
> who shared our board: just once he ate
> too slowly, dying in our trap
> from necessary hunger and a broken back.

Now, one difference between Mr. Dugan and Burns is clear: Mr. Dugan doesn't really give a hang about the mouse, but in order to make a poem he pretends that he does. If you ask how I can say this, when Mr. Dugan seems so concerned that he asks the Lord to accept his guilt, etc., let me say that, if he cared about mice so much, he wouldn't have set the trap at all. Burns, you'll recall, uncovered the mouse's nest while he was ploughing—a different circumstance altogether. And the padded line, "from necessary hunger and a broken back," shows that

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Mr. Dugan's eye, at the climactic moment, is on his syllables, not on the bleeding mouse. Now, one doesn't require poets to be sorry for mice, but one does require that they don't pretend to emotions they don't have.

Cavafy is the shyest of men; his poems seem to have left him with regret. He is not much read in America—but then, Americans are ignorant about modern poetry. Some years ago John Mavrogordato translated Cavafy's poems into English; this present collection is translated by Rae Dalven, and I have been told that there is a third newly translated collection—which, in my case, I have not got. The Dalven translations seem accurate, though they are flatter than Mavrogordato's and without rhyme. The collection has the advantage of one of the best prefaces W. H. Auden has written—Auden and Cavafy have met by sympathy, rather than for the occasion.

There are some special aspects to Cavafy. He lived in Alexandria for most of his life. He lived also in an Alexandria of his imagination, a country of ephemeral pleasures and aesthetic delights, under the rule of one man or another—Antony or Augustus, what did it matter? And he wrote poems celebrating homosexual love. There is much that is moving in these poems, for they spring from an absolute purity of spirit. And this poet, who is so reluctant to engage in public matters, who is sitting at a table drinking *pastiches,* as it were, marks what is truly significant about the crowd. The young emperor—how energetic he seems, yet he is too refined, and his taste for certain pleasures will bring jackals into the amphitheater.

Cavafy's "Waiting for the Barbarians" is one of the great set pieces, but he has other less famous poems that are as effective. In "The City" we find his pathos, and his power to draw from intimate life sounds that reverberate through space and time:

> You said, "I will go to another land, I will go to another sea.
> Another city will be found, a better one than this.
> Every effort of mine is a condemnation of fate,
> and my heart is—like a corpse—buried.
> How long will my mind remain in this wasteland.
> Wherever I turn my eyes, wherever I may look
> I see black ruins of my life here,
> where I spent so many years destroying and wasting."
>
> You will find no new lands, you will find no other seas.
> The city will follow you. You will roam the same
> streets. And you will age in the same neighborhoods:
> and you will grow gray in these same houses.
> Always you will arrive in this city. Do not hope for any other—
> There is no ship for you, there is no road.
> As you have destroyed your life here
> in this little corner, you have ruined it in the entire world.

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George Seferis, translated by Rex Warner, appears under the auspices of the Old Guard—blurbs by MacLeish, Eliot, Bowra, and C. Day Lewis. The Old Guard are always adding or subtracting: "I believe Seferis to be one of the three or four most important living European poets." Among the rather vapid, fading lines, the eternal references to light, water, cisterns, etcetera, there are flashes of genuine melancholy:

> But what are they looking for, our souls that travel
> On decks of ships out-worn, crowded together with
> Sallow-faced women, crying babies,
> Unable to distract themselves even with the flying fish
> Or with the stars to which the mast heads point;
> Rubbed-out by the gramophone records,
> Involved unwillingly in aimless pilgrimages,
> Murmuring broken thoughts from foreign languages?

I am not surprised that Eliot recommends this poetry; he has already written it.

Six Poets of Modern Greece, translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard in a handsome volume, brings together selected poems by Cavafy, Sikelianos, Seferis, Antoniou, Elytis and Gatsos. As my Greek is imperfect, I will not compare these translations with other translations of the same poems, or with the originals. In this collection, Cavafy seems the most important. The other poets, with the exception of Elytis, are rather pallid; Sikelianos is a sensitive spirit, but he is always looking to the past. Elytis is altogether more vigorous; his "Mad Pomegranate Tree" is an explosion of images; he delights in the moment, as in these lines from "This Wind that Loiters":

> Great summer of chalk
> Great summer of cork
> The red sails slanting in gusts of wind
> On the sea-floor white creatures, sponges
> Accordions of the rocks
> Perch from the fingers even of bad fishermen
> Proud reefs on the fishing lines of the sun.

Some familiarity with foreign poets, though only in translation, encourages us to think again, and not to follow the old to their graves. When we compare the poetry of Eliot or Ransom with the poetry of Rilke or Lorca, for example, we see that "modern poetry" is not at all what it is said to be in American schools. The absence from American poetry of any significant emotional or political content—not to mention imagination—is attributable to the influence of a few men whose own lives were so dry, and their opinions so reactionary, that even they were ashamed to express them. But let us no longer say that this is modern poetry!

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John Betjeman's poems seem a special English taste, but as part of his *Summoned by Bells* has been published in *The New Yorker,* some Americans must also like them. A hundred years ago a poet, in a long book of blank verse, described the growth of a poet's mind; the poetic process, he said, took its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. Mr. Betjeman, in the same medium, celebrates the comforts of the middleclass; his poetry originates in bath water:

> Luxuriating backwards in the bath
> I swish the warmer water round my legs
> Toward my shoulders, and the waves of heat
> Bring those five years of Marlborough through to me
> In comfortable retrospect. . . .

It is tempting to think that the difference between *The Prelude* and Mr. Betjeman's book measures the decline of imagination in English poetry over the last hundred years. Yet there are good poets still in England—Ted Hughes, for example.

Mr. Betjeman's popularity is not hard to explain. His verse appeals to those—both English and American—who wish to return to the world-before-taxes. Their hearts are with Winnie-the-Pooh; for them the church clock stands at three, and there *is* honey still for tea. It is only fair to say that Mr. Betjeman makes no great claims for his verse. He takes part in the charade with good taste and smiling self-deprecation. Poetry, he seems to say, is really no more important than tiddlywinks.

I find it hard to evaluate the poems of Maxine W. Kumin, for what I want from poetry is something altogether different from this—yet her verse is intelligent, skilful, and perceptive. There is a poem to her son, a poem to a dead friend; there is a poem about the movie "Casablanca"; there is a poem on "Crib biting, n., a vice/ of horses"; there is poetry about many things that might occur in a civilized, reasonable life. Here is a specimen which shows her sharp vision and authentic feeling:

> For lunch we shared a coconut.
> Not twenty yards away
> a terrible white heron fished
> in an absent jerky fashion.
> He was anything but fierce
> or facile; I had never seen
> an awkward bird till then.
> This shamed me.
> Only when he turned to us I saw
> his upper bill was eaten away
> by pellet or disease, and pity
> soured in my gut.

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The trouble with this verse—well done though it is—is that it is almost entirely a verse of statement. There is no mystery in it. That is to say, once more we are confronted with the attitudes and tone of prose, in the form of verse. Is it unfair to ask for something more? It depends on what you expect from poetry; how important you think it is.

WILLIAM MEREDITH

New Poetry Recordings[1]

A POET'S READING OF HIS POEMS is probably as near to an ingenuous commentary as he can give us about his intentions, certainly about his designs on our ears. When he reads he is performing a composition of which he alone has heard the ideal version; and however inadequate to that ideal music he, or we, may feel his performance to be, it has a unique authority. He was the man, he was there. A reading is unlike anything he may tell us about the poem because it can't add anything that isn't present in the text. Even when he glosses the poem with information about its meaning or origin before he reads it, we are at last confronted—and few of us can read this way easily—with a continuous, irreversible pattern of affecting sound, which has its own way. The talk is mere intermission talk. The poet's attempt to give the pattern its real force is made when he reproduces it.

A reading, of course, can be no better than the poems read, but it can be every bit as good. It can bring a body of poetry into full existence, which is something we cannot always do for ourselves. The singing voice of Dylan Thomas, the incantatory voices of Muriel Rukeyser and R. P. Blackmur, the thrashing voice of Theodore Roethke, the "saying" voice of Robert Frost—these sounds can not be exorcised from the ear that has heard them, and they provide important insights into the poems they project. It is a happy accident of science that this aural experience is now available everywhere (if not yet cheaply or easily) at a time when fewer and fewer people learn to make these sounds for themselves, either as children or, except as a beneficial form of worry, in school or college.

1 AN ALBUM OF MODERN POETRY, An Anthology Read by the Poets, edited by Oscar Williams. Library of Congress Recording Laboratory. (PL 20, 21, 22) $15.00. YALE SERIES OF RECORDED POETS. Allen Tate, Robert Lowell, Stanley Kunitz, Dudley Fitts, George Starbuck, Louis Simpson, John Crowe Ransom, Conrad Aiken, Louise Bogan, Yvor Winters, Lee Anderson, R. P. Blackmur, Marianne Moore, Robert Penn Warren, Richard Eberhart, Theodore Weiss, John Hollander, Vernon Watkins, Louis MacNeice, C. Day Lewis, Winfield Townley Scott, Robert Frost. (YP 300 through 321) $5.95 each, 4 for the price of 3, 22 for $95.

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The occasion for this review is the receipt of a new anthology of readings from the Library of Congress and a group of individual readings from the new and excellent Yale Series of Recorded Poets. Similar recordings (from Caedmon, Spoken Arts, the Library of Congress and with other English and American labels) carry the voices of almost every living poet of any stature writing in English, the permanence of the plastic in many instances commenting ironically on the transience of human reputation. What these records will mean to the future is perhaps more interesting to imagine than what they mean to us. If we had such records of Hopkins or Wyatt or Chaucer, what a lot of criticism we could do without. From our time forward a certain continuity in the performance, and therefore in the understanding, of a poet's work seems assured, once he has met the simple test that Hopkins, Wyatt and Chaucer have passed.

Oscar Williams' "Album of Modern Poetry" presents, chiefly from the archives of the Library of Congress, readings by forty-six poets, from Robert Frost to W. S. Merwin. Like any anthology, some of its most interesting effects come from chance juxtapositions of poets of very different intention or scale: Stevens following Frost, Millay following Jeffers, or Louise Bogan (b. 1897) following, through some failure of chivalry and scholarship, Edgar Lee Masters (b. 1869). (The anthologist calls the order of the records "loosely chronological".) Like any anthology of modern poetry, it suggests that our well-known poets have not yet begun to be sorted and graded, but enjoy the specious democracy which the present lends and which posterity, with its aristocratic tastes, quickly abrogates—even as we have thinned the Victorian anthologies. I cannot believe that Merrill Moore or Gene Derwood, to mention only two of the respected dead where one might mention ten of the living poets in this album, will be represented in the anthologies fifty years from now.

The most interesting readings here and in the Yale records are those which project the liveliest sense of character, and a fitness of character to poem. Even where the reading is not particularly skillful or articulate, as with Marianne Moore and Auden here, this rapport between person and poem is the mark of the truest poetry. The poems are *said* (to borrow again from the old master of this art, Robert Frost) by the only person who could have heard the experience in them. With the lesser poets it is not quite the same: we hear them reading poems that have occurred to them, poems they have accomplished, but there is lacking this sense of an inevitable connection between the voice and idiom on the one hand, and the character on the other.

Three poets in this album whose voices relate strikingly to their poems are Wallace Stevens, Robert Graves and Theodore Roethke. Stevens relinquishes his phrases with an intensity of pause (Leigh Hunt's phrase), a hesitation that is like difficulty. It is as if he were reluctant to cause all that exquisite trouble. Graves's enormous human

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poise—an ounce more would be egomania—makes his readings seem like acts of undeserved generosity, the largesse of a victorious chieftain. Roethke tells you about very personal experiences which seem (and here his art is like that of a great singer) almost to exceed his poor powers to express; the tremendous force of these poems lies in the earnestness with which they strive to articulate feeling—successfully, but with some evidence of the strife artlessly allowed to remain.

The voices of three women poets emerge with interesting individuality. Muriel Rukeyser intones her poem. Those who have heard her read more than this one lyric will recall that she habitually makes poetry seem part of a larger ritual, an activity like dance in which all the body's rhythm is involved, not just the subtle head. Louise Bogan delivers her poems very slowly, not hesitantly like Stevens but as though to suggest a detailed examination of, a roving over, a static surface. The finished poem is all you are meant to hear, you feel, but she labors to construct it again each time she reads it—an arresting effect more noticeable on the Yale record.

Edna St. Vincent Millay's reading is extraordinary, and no matter what allowance you make for shifting fashions, extraordinarily phony. This is not a question of a slight pose of affectation, as it is with Robinson Jeffers, who does a kind of Actors' Studio sincere bit, or Henry Reed who throws his two fine poems away in an agony of self-consciousness. Edna St. Vincent Millay reads with the whoop and tremulo of Margaret Dumont in a Marx Brothers picture, and there seems to be some connection between this pose of diction and the poses of feeling and language in her later poems. Poetry ought to be able to purge all affectation, but as a minimum it must purge affectations of speech. It is sobering that with so few years of perspective we have become as Posterity with respect to one manner of reading, if not indeed to one reputation. No one intending to do Millay's poems a service now would present them in her own overblown readings.

The introductory note to the album pleads the anthologist's familiar difficulty in getting permissions and the special one of getting recordings. Only Dylan Thomas is mentioned by name, but of living poets of major rank Ezra Pound and Randall Jarrell are also absent. In view of Mr. Williams' occasionally promiscuous inclusions, it is hard to explain the exclusion of R. P. Blackmur and Robert Penn Warren, and only a little easier to explain why X and Y and Z are here instead of Shapiro or Merrill or Snodgrass. The proportions are sometimes injudicious: twice as much of Jean Garrigue as of Robert Lowell, twice as much of Oscar Williams as of Allen Tate. But these are an anthologist's privileges and perils, and in general this volume is as useful and exasperating as Mr. Williams' other treasure troves, in their way the most generous we have.

The Library of Congress volume, recordings taken over a period of years and under various conditions, are understandably uneven in

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quality of reproduction. I can imagine no justification for their having copied the final Frost poem at the wrong RPM, but otherwise the material has been spliced fairly unobtrusively from what was to hand. The Yale Series of Recorded Poets, on the other hand, sets an extremely high standard of fidelity in the first twelve of the twenty-two records now offered. Lee Anderson, the poet whose experience in recording poetry seems to lie behind this success, has brought the voices close, individual and true. The editorial notes prepared by members of the English Department at Yale may well be the most intelligent jacket material modern poets have ever enjoyed.

A 50-minute long-playing record is ideal for revealing (or exposing) a poetic voice. The *range* of a poet is as audible as any other aspect of his writing, and in some cases (like a live poetry reading) will astonish a reader who knows only a single volume or a few anthology pieces. The present recordings of R. P. Blackmur and Louise Bogan are likely to do a good ideal for the reputations of those two poets, who are inaccurately spoken for in most anthologies. I have called Miss Bogan's poetry static above, but I would make it clear that this is praise: the poetry stands with the repose, at best, of a greek colonnade, and at least, of a string of pearls. And if its range is not as great as that figure suggests, the quality is; and the Yale recording captures the quality.

R. P. Blackmur's poems are essentially spells, and it is always a revelation to hear them laid on by the mage himself. They are directed to the ear. Readers who are put off by his convoluted prose may be surprised at how lucid the poems regularly are, and how lyric. "Mr. Virtue and the Three Bears" is probably the best sestina in modern English. Mr. Blackmur saves his sweetest honey for his poems and is a much better poet than is generally recognized.

Of the Yale records under review (the first twelve listed above in what is apparently the order of release), the most interesting to this listener were those of Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom and Robert Lowell. To say that a recording does justice to one of these three poets is perhaps praise enough. The series promises to be the best we have. I hope Mr. Anderson will not make a practice of interpolating interviews with the poets, as is done on the Starbuck and Winters records, which brings an air of self-conscious uplift like an explanation of the sonata allegro form by the conductor of a symphony. The poet's own comments are another thing: they originate with his thoughts when confronted with his poems and an audience. But spontaneous discussions of poetry do not seem to record well and are as ephemeral as last month's record review.

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SIGURD BURCKHARDT

The Poetry of Hugo von Hofmannsthal[1]

THIS IS THE SECOND VOLUME in a projected three-volume edition of Hofmannsthal's works in translation. (Volume I, published in 1952, has selections from his prose; volume III will bring his major plays.) It contains most of the poetry, lyric and dramatic, which he wrote between the ages of seventeen and twenty-seven (1890-1900). When the first of these poems appeared under the pseudonym "Loris" (Austrian law forbade publications by high school students), they won their author instant fame; and when "Loris" revealed himself as a mere *Gymnasiast,* the literary leaders of Vienna—Schnitzler, Bahr and others—accepted him as their equal. They saw in him not merely another Chatterton, a *Wunderkind* of verbal mastery; what astonished them was the boy's mature modernity, his uncanny feeling for the temper and distempers of the age—in fact his wisdom. Stefan George hurried to Vienna to win Hofmannsthal by storm for the cause of establishing a "wholesome dictatorship" over German letters. But the well-born young Austrian was not looking for a self-anointed autocrat to serve under; he refused to surrender even to bouquets of roses sent into his schoolroom. Though perhaps not as wise as his elders thought him, he was wise enough to know that he would not flourish in the overheated atmosphere of the George Circle.

The translations are generally good and at times excellent, so that English readers should have almost as little difficulty as Germans have in sharing the delighted wonder of Hofmannsthal's first audience. But part of the pleasure will be, I think, historical sympathy—as when we read a beautiful but distinctly old-fashioned hand. From the sobering distance of seventy years we are still moved—but more by the perfection and poignancy with which this poetry captures a turn-of-the-century mood than by what I will call "poetic truth." The themes are universal and major: mutability and identity, multiplicity and wholeness, dream, illusion and reality. The mode is contemporary enough to be called modern; "symbolist" describes it fairly adequately. But taken together, the poems leave the feeling that mode and themes between them have dictated the experience; the tension is lacking that comes where the perceived truth must be wrested from a self-willed, recalcitrant medium,

1 POEMS AND VERSE PLAYS, by *Hugo von Hofmannsthal,* bilingual edition, edited and introduced by *Michael Hamburger,* translated by *John Bednall, Arthur Davidson, Michael Hamburger, John Mander, Christopher Middleton, Stephen Spender* and *Vernon Watkins,* with a preface by *T. S. Eliot.* Pantheon Books, Bollingen Series XXXIII-2. $6.00.

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or where technique becomes the instrument of discovery. The young Hofmannsthal's most persistent, and most personal, theme—the unapproachable strangeness of things—is a sign of his awareness that as yet his art stands between him and the truth.

Even at seventeen Hofmannsthal was far more assured than the young Rilke; he knew how to avoid the cloying richness and the false simplicity which at times mar Rilke's poetry as late as *Das Buch der Bilder*. From the beginning he seems to have had natural tact in managing his effects:

> And children grow with deeply wondering eyes
> That know of nothing, grow a while and die,
> And every one of us goes his own way
>
> And bitter fruit will ripen by and by
> And like dead birds come hurtling down at night
> And for a few days fester where they lie.
>
> And always the wind blows, and we recite
> And hear again the phrases thin with wear,
> And in our limbs feel langour and delight . . .
>
> To see such things do travellers leave their homes?
> Yet he says much who utters [literally: says] "evening,"
> A word from which grave thoughts and sadness flow
> Like rich dark honey from the hollow combs.

Even in translation this is fine; but after some pages of it we find ourselves murmuring: "If music be the food of love, play on"; and we begin to wish for a Feste, or at least a Cesario, to give us brighter sounds and colors and sharper contours.

Hofmannsthal himself was not satisfied with the melancholy wisdom he had come to so early. What he clearly wanted was a new kind of directness, which would rid words and images of their quotation marks. Again and again he tells himself and us that this is not all, that there is a world beyond and beneath that must find voice:

> Many truly down below must perish,
> Where the heavy oars of ships are passing . . .
> Many destinies with mine are woven . . .
> And my part is larger than this slender
> Life's ascending flame and narrow lyre.

The trouble is that the resolve sounds oddly muffled; this tone of talking about galley slaves falls somewhat short of the brutal reality. There is a grain of poetic justice in the malicious legend that Hofmannsthal fingered precious stones while he composed his verses. The lyrical pathos of many of his early verse plays—especially *Death and the Fool*

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and *The Emperor and the Witch*—derives from a kind of contradiction between vehicle and tenor, tone and message. Claudio, the Fool, is a *fin-de-siècle* Everyman; summoned by Death, he sees that he has not lived yet, because all his experience has been mediate, filtered and framed into "experience." The Emperor breaks free of his enslavement to the beautiful Witch by learning to understand the grim realities on which his eminence and splendor rest. But this is how it sounds:

> Yes, the place on which I stand
> Was given me by monstrous theft,
> And with destiny are filled
> The distances and places near.
> With many various adventures,
> Like a fairy-tale, the world
> Bristles, and is like the cloak
> Unfurling from my shoulders. Look,
> And destiny is everywhere;
> All things glittering join together,
> Never sundered, like the meshes
> Of my golden shirt of mail.

The intuition of a quasi-mystical wholeness which Hofmannsthal sought to express again and again, and which undoubtedly had been a genuine and determining experience, is too softly focussed to convince us:

> Dreamlike he felt the whole of human fate
> As his own self he felt in every limb,
> Nothing was near or distant, small or great.
>
> And as the earth grew cool deep under him,
> Night snatched away the warmth the treetops kept,
> Darkness welled up from craters dank and dim,
>
> Such was his joy in the great rhythm kept
> By all of life that in great drunkenness
> Like a young lion over rocks he leapt.

Both T. S. Eliot, in an inexcusably perfunctory, elder-statesman preface, and Michael Hamburger in his intelligent and well-informed introduction compare Hofmannsthal with Yeats. The comparison is just —up to a point. The two poets, beginning to write almost at the same time and age, are often startlingly similar in mood and theme:

> I see my life go dripping as a stream
> From change to change; I have been many things—
> A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
> Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,
> An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,

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A king sitting upon a chair of gold,
And all these things are wonderful and great;
But now I have grown nothing, being all,
And the whole world weighs down upon my heart.

This could easily be a fine translation of a Hofmannsthal poem. Nor does the similarity end there. Both poets felt the need of a "mythology," a store and system of shared symbols or metaphors which would give their poetry body and outline, redeem it from the subjectivity of mood and esthetic solipsism. But in the search for this mythology Yeats and Hofmannsthal moved apart as they went on. Perhaps the accidents of birth and nationality played a role: Yeats came to speak for a nation struggling to be born, while Hofmannsthal pledged himself to an old, richly traditioned empire which was in the last stages of disintegration. The traditions Yeats drew on—Irish folklore, spiritualism and mysticism of all sorts—were socially disembodied and offered themselves for shaping into a new coherence. Hofmannsthal made it his task to conserve the spirit, the idea of an order which had fully embodied itself in art, manners and ritual and which was now dying.

However it was: when the two poets came, at almost the same time, to the point where they had to find a new language, Yeats discovered that his poetry must "accept the baptism of the gutter," while Hofmannsthal lost, or rather sacrificed, his personal lyrical voice. From about 1900 on, Yeats began to write the poetry for which he is remembered; Hofmannsthal, with impressive consistency and self-effacement, assumed the office of preserver. He adapted English, Spanish and Greek plays, edited high school anthologies, wrote criticism and gave lectures intended to revive and strengthen the great tradition. His justly famous farewell to lyric poetry, the "Letter of Lord Chandos" (translated in Vol. I of the series), tells how he fell silent: not because his poetic vein "dried up" but because he came to feel that speech was an unjustifiable presumption, a violation of the ineffable truth of things. As the hero of his later comedy, *The Man Who Was Difficult,* was to put it: "Talking is based on an indecently overdeveloped sense of self-importance."

So Hofmannsthal became, consciously and programmatically, a writer who lent his voice to others. He wrote the poignantly unassuming libretto for *Der Rosenkavalier* and the mysteriously ironic one for *Ariadne auf Naxos.* His monument is the Salzburg Festival, that aristocratically understated answer to Bayreuth: set in a baroque town, as graceful as the Bayreuth Festspielhaus is pompous; devoted to tradition and continuity rather than to the worship of an egomaniacal and revolutionary genius, keynoted each year by the devout anonymity of *Everyman* instead of the brassy self-assertion of a Wagner overture. Salzburg is the true empire's quiet rebuke to the grandiloquence of the upstart usurper to the north. And if few people today know that Hofmannsthal was the man behind it, that also is fitting.

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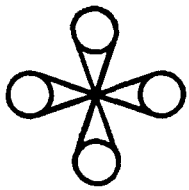

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He might have said *in propria persona* what Yeats said through one of his masks: that his medieval (or better baroque) knees lacked health until they bent. He was buried in the habit of the Franciscan Third Order. His conservatism, gentle, generous and unassuming rather than fastidious and exclusive, rewarded him not only with librettos, adaptations and eloquently lucid prose, but also with one of the three great comedies in the German repertory. The essential discovery every artist has to make—of the otherness of reality and its quiddities—this dramatist's discovery came to him in the substance of history and tradition. But it is anticipated in the best of the early poems, especially in "The Youth in the Landscape," a kind of Catholic antiphone to Milton's tensely Protestant sonnet on his blindness:

> So now to those strange children he went up
> And was prepared upon an unknown threshold
> To let a new life pass away in service . . .
> The breath of flowers spoke to him, but only
> Of alien beauty—and in silence he
> Breathed in the pristine air, but without longing:
> Only the need of serving made him glad.

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